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"..." Speech

Bold Parseltongue

italics thoughts

Philosophers Stone Slytherin Style!

Chapter 1: Childhood

A 5-year-old Harry Potter was sitting in his cupboard tapping his foot against the wall with a look of utter boredom on his face. His uncle Vernon had thrown him in there for around the 5th time that day. Harry had spilt orange juice all over Aunt Petunia because Dudley, his cousin, had punched him in the face and sent him flying backwards. Harry had to admit though; it had almost been worth the pain and the punishment to see a furious Aunt Petunia covered in bits of orange peel. Unfortunately, nobody else had found it even remotely amusing and Harry would probably be stuck in his cupboard for at least two days without any meals. Luckily Harry had discovered a way of unlocking the door to his cupboard. He just had to concentrate really hard on the door opening. The only problem was that he often became very tired and dizzy after doing it so mostly he just stayed put. But tonight Harry was very hungry so when he thought that the Dursleys were asleep, you could tell by the loud snoring from Uncle Vernon and Dudley, he sneaked out to the kitchen. Harry was just about to open the fridge and steal some cake when he heard a voice say **How the hell can I get out of thisssss place? It'ssss like a mazzze and it'sss unnaturally clean.**

Harry jumped and, looking down, saw a snake. It was quite small and black with silver markings. But what caught Harry's attention were its eyes. They were a deep purple colour. Harry, who you must remember was quite young, thought it must be a magic snake that could talk. *How amazing is that?* thought Harry and then said, **Want help? I can show you the way out of here if you want.**

You can speak, human? asked the snake amazed. **My parentsss have told me of wizzardss that can talk to our kind but I never believed them.**

Well I have never heard of *snakes* that can talk. Are you magical? And what do you mean by wizard? I'm Harry Potter by the way. Who are you? asked Harry, staring at snake in innocent curiosity.

My name is Nemesis, but you can call me Isis. And I sense magic in you, Harry Potter. After bewildered questions from Harry, Isis explained about the rudiments of the magical world.

So you mean that magic like in the fairy tails really exists. And I'm a wizard? asked Harry excitedly.

Yep, must be if you're a parselmouth, replied Nemesis.

Parselmouth? What's that? asked Harry, confused by all the new information loaded on him.

Well, it's someone who can talk to snakes. Very rare gift. But I wouldn't go around bragging about it if I were you, people don't like parselmouths, they think they're evil.

I'm not evil, said Harry indignantly. While his relatives daily reminded him of his 'freakishness' Harry never took any notice of them.

I know, I'm just saying what other people think, said Isis soothingly. **Don't worry about it. Hey, would you mind if I stayed with you for a while? It gets kind of lonely on your own, you know?**

Sure, said Harry happily, then immediately sobered up saying, **I don't know though. My Aunt and Uncle would kill me.**

They don't like snakes? asked Isis.

Well no, but that's not the point, said Harry and told her all about how horrible his Aunt and uncle were. In fact, once he got going, he

ranted on and on for at least half an hour before stopping with a sheepish grin. **Sorry about that. I tend to get a bit carried away.**

No problem. They sssound awful. But what if I jussst hide. They don't ever need to know about me. How about it? Isis asked hopefully.

It might work. Not much harm in trying anyway. I'll show you to my room, replied Harry. When Isis saw his pitiful cupboard under the stairs she muttered something about biting the Dursleys for their idiocy.

You're not poisonous are you? asked Harry worried. **Only I think the Dursleys will notice something's up if they all die of snakebites. They're stupid, but not *that* stupid.**

Well, actually I am poissonousss. I'm a moon sssnake, she said proudly. When she saw Harry's blank stare she sighed and said **That meansss I'm one of the mossst poissonousss ssnakes in the world. But don't worry. I won't bite anyone,** she added hurriedly seeing Harry's rather scared face.

Okay then, said Harry yawning, too tired to get worked up over a venomous snake. **Well, I'm going to nick some stuff to eat and then I'll head off to bed. You want something?**

Muesssli would be nice, I like muesssli, hissed Isis dreamily.

Snakes eat cereal? Really? asked Harry, raising his eyebrows in disbelief.

What, replied the snake defensively. **It's good for you. Extremely healthy and has few calories. You should eat some.**

No thanks. I'm fine with a chocolate bar. I can't believe a snakes giving me nutrition advice, he replied, rummaging around in a cupboard.

Well, I guess you don't really need to diet seeing as you're stick-like already. I've seen grasshoppers with more fat on them than you.

Rolling his eyes Harry just headed off to his cupboard and curled up on his lumpy mattress. Isis, after realising that he wasn't listening, shut up and trailed after him. After slithering around trying to find a comfy position, she finally settled down, much to Harry's relief.

Goodnight, friend, hissed Isis, curling up. Harry felt a warm feeling spread through his stomach. He had a friend. The first friend he ever remembered having, as Dudley had always scared everyone off. Harry smiled, feeling content for the first time in years. Suddenly the Dursleys didn't seem that bad. Now that he had a friend he didn't care about them anymore. With this happy thought Harry fell asleep with Nemesis beside him.

Chapter two

Over the next few weeks Harry began to practise magic. At first he wasn't very good at it and got tired very easily, but he soon got better after Isis explained some of the theory to him. The rest of his free time (which wasn't much after the Dursleys loaded on chores) he spent chatting with Isis who, while interesting and funny, was also extremely weird. Apparently, her life long ambition was to learn Morris dancing and to win the lottery. When Harry pointed out that she was a snake and asked what she wanted to do with all the money, she replied unconcernedly that she hadn't thought that far but might buy up a few rat farms. He also learnt that she was an orphan like him. She was born in Russia but then her mother was killed and a little while later Isis was captured.

The human who caught me wasss from England and brought me back with him. hissed Isis, curling around his neck. **Then one day I essscaped and ssspent a couple of weeksss wandering around and then ta da! Here I am.**

Isis also told Harry about her species. According to her moon snakes were very rare, almost unheard of. In fact, people only found out they existed a few years ago. This was because they had certain magic powers such as becoming unnoticeable (not the same as invisible) and they could understand any human language. Their venom was also unique. They could kill within seconds and change someone's memory. Said skill was the main reason nobody knew about them. As soon as anybody saw them they would eradicate any knowledge of themselves. Harry wasn't certain if he believed all that, though, as Isis tended to exaggerate quite a bit and was also rather conceited. One thing that was true, however, was that she had quite a good understanding of wizard magic, although she couldn't do any. Harry, needless to say, was fascinated. They would stay up swapping stories way into the night. Apart from when the Dursleys were asleep he didn't have any time to himself. Since he had met Nemesis he had been walking around in a happy daze. This, of course, infuriated Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon who lived to make him miserable. Harry was given extra chores, starved and locked in his cupboard but to their consternation nothing seemed to affect him. So they just settled for ignoring him, which was fine by him.

As the years went by Harry continued learning wandless magic and was actually quite good at it. He didn't know any actual spells so he just had to will something to happen, which often took a great deal of time and concentration, but he was gradually getting faster. Sometimes he'd become disheartened, but the thought of how much power he would have if he continued pushed him on. Harry was, much to his delight, already able to turn his most hated teacher's hair neon colours whenever he felt like it. Luckily, the teacher never traced it back to him. At regular school he was completely awful. Just the thought of anything more complicated than long division made his head spin. Unfortunately Isis was just as bad if not worse so he couldn't cheat. The only thing he was relatively good at was French. But then again, Isis was able to hiss answers to him in tests so he couldn't take any credit for it. The other subject he was good at was physical education. In an attempt to get him out of the house the Dursleys had signed him up to a gym class out of school, which included acrobatics and basic karate. Harry was actually amongst the best in the class because he practised any free moment he got. The way Harry saw it was that the more fit he was, the less likely he was to be pounded into the ground by Dudley's gang. Self preservation worked wonders. In fact he was the only person in the whole school who Dudley steered clear of. Not only because he couldn't catch him, but also because he was afraid of him. Ever since Harry had 'accidentally' made Dudley's pants fall down during school he was absolutely terrified. This meant that every one else steered clear of him as well, leaving Harry alone most of the time.

Through all his years of school Harry had never had a single friend. Luckily, Harry didn't care as he had Isis who kept him company in class hissing comments at him from his school bag. On reflection, Harry decided that maybe this was the reason why he'd flunked almost every class. Harry was still better than Dudley, though, who only passed by bribing the teachers and forcing other students to do his homework for him. Needless to say hardly anyone liked him, but they were all too afraid to say so. One thing that everyone agreed on was that 'Dudley's weird freak cousin' was a complete mystery. He always had a blank expression on his face that gave you the impression that you were talking to a brick wall. The only time he showed any emotion was when he burst out laughing in the middle of

class for absolutely no reason at all, seemingly having a conversation with his schoolbag.

While Harry didn't enjoy his life at the Dursleys he had to admit it was better than before Isis came. At least now he had a friend he could talk to. He also had the smug satisfaction in knowing that he knew something the Dursleys didn't and that one day he would get his revenge.

[illegible]

Chapter 3

The morning Harry got his letter was eventful to say the least. The day started normally. Harry was woken up by Aunt Petunia screaming up at him to “come down now and make breakfast, you ungrateful brat!” while Isis muttered darkly about biting **that annoying horsse-faced** woman with a **voicse like a raging banshee**.

Then, once everyone had finished eating breakfast, Dudley started parading around the room in his smeltings uniform while his parents looked on teary eyed. (“oh it looks *perfect* Didydumkins.”) Harry and Isis meanwhile were trying not to burst out laughing. Uncle Vernon had just launched into his “This is a very proud day for us” speech when an owl flew in the window and dropped a letter on the table. For a few seconds everybody just stared at it in shock before the whole family threw themselves forward and proceeded to fight over it. Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon wanted it because they knew what it was, Harry wanted it because he’d seen his name on it and Dudley wanted it because Harry did. After getting elbowed in the stomach a few times Harry performed the wandless equivalent of the summoning charm and ran up to the bathroom locking the door behind him. Ignoring his Uncle Vernon hammering on the door demanding to be let in, Harry ripped open the envelope. Three bits of parchment fluttered to the floor. Grabbing the nearest one Harry began to read. ‘Dear Mr Potter,

We are pleased to inform you that you have been accepted to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. We expect your owl by no later than the 1st of August. Please find enclosed a list of books needed.’

Harry was ecstatic. Isis had told him about wizarding schools but he hadn’t been sure that he would be accepted. Picking up the next parchment he found that it was another letter. It read: ‘Dear Mr Potter, it has come to our attention that you live in a muggle (non-magic) household. In light of this a professor from the school will come at 12 o’clock on Monday to help you buy your school things and answer any questions you might have.

Sincerely, Professor McGonnagal, deputy headmistress.

Monday, that's tomorrow! Thought Harry in alarm. **Isis, do you have any idea of how to convince the Dursleys to let me go?** he asked.

I think it'sss time for you to introduce them to me, replied Isis with a smirk. **You'll be leaving soon though they can't retaliate.**

What a wonderful idea. This will be fun, said Harry, an evil grin forming on his face. **Come on, lets go.** With that he opened the door to be faced with a very irate Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia. "Boy! If you think we're going to let you go to this, this *school*, you are sorely mistaken!" bellowed Uncle Vernon, purple faced. "I refuse to have your freakishness under my roof!"

"Oh really?" said Harry sneering. "I'm so sorry, but I don't give a shit about your opinion."

At this Uncle Vernon lost what little control he had and advanced on Harry menacingly, but he stooped short when he caught sight of Nemesis, who had slithered out of her hiding place under Harry's clothes and was hissing dangerously. All the blood left his face and he backtracked hastily.

"What the hell is *that!*" Uncle Vernon yelled, looking remarkably like a blown up hamster.

"Oh, you mean Nemesis! She's my pet snake and very protective of me," replied Harry taking vindictive pleasure in the Dursley's fear. Uncle Vernon was now pressed up against the wall, whimpering, while Isis advanced on him. "She's a moon snake, you know. The most poisonous snake in existence," said Harry conversationally. "They can kill with one bite." The Dursleys were all staring in horror while Nemesis began coiling herself around Uncle Vernon's neck.

"Get it off him!" shrieked Aunt Petunia. "Only if you let me go to Hogwarts," said Harry coldly.

"Okay, okay, fine!" croaked Uncle Vernon. "And you have to promise to be nice to me and not make me do any chores," said Harry grinning.

"I promise! Now get this thing off me!" yelled Uncle Vernon. After pretending to think it over for a couple of minutes just to see him squirm, Harry called Nemesis off. As soon as the Dursleys had run away, they both burst out laughing.

Oh my God. Did you ssssee their facessss. We should have done that yearssss ago, hissed Nemesis. Harry couldn't even answer as he was laughing too much.

Chapter 4

The next day saw Harry darting madly around the room with only one sock on trying to eat, comb his hair and get dressed all at the same time. It was ten to twelve and the professor from Hogwarts would be arriving any minute. Harry had, unfortunately, slept in. Normally he would have his Aunt screaming at him to get up at around six a.m but after yesterday's ... events, all the Dursleys were still cowering in their bedrooms, refusing to move. Not even Dudley left, even though he had to miss four of his favourite TV programs. Finally, just as Harry was finished getting ready, the doorbell rang. Rushing downstairs with Isis draped around his neck Harry skidded to a halt in the hall. But before Harry opened the door, he paused to wipe his face of any emotion. He went from being a rather hyperactive and clumsy looking kid to being a calm, even bored looking child who gave off a sense of power, or at least that's what Harry liked to think. Opening the door Harry found a tall, greasy haired man standing on the doorstep. The thing that Harry noticed most, however, was that this man looked dangerous to cross. He seemed like a dark brooding shadow and, what's more, he seemed just a little bit irritated. Raging mad would not be an understatement. And what was worse was that the anger seemed to be directed at him.

"Ah, you must be Harry Potter I presume," said the man in a soft, silky voice. "I am Professor Snape and will have the dubious pleasure of introducing you to the wizarding world." *Yep* thought Harry *this man has 'bad guy' written all over him. He has it all, the greasy hair, the dark cloak, the sarcasm.* Out loud he said "It is a pleasure to meet you to Professor. Where will we be buying my school stuff?"

"Diagon Alley," said Snape with a sneer. He then grabbed Harry's hand and shoved an old trashcan into it. Harry immediately felt a jerk behind his navel and next second he was standing in a rather crowded street outside a grubby-looking pub. "Well don't just stand there staring. Follow me," sneered Snape and swept off. *Great, just great,* thought Harry. *My overgrown bat of a teacher hates me and I don't even know why.* Sighing, he followed Snape into the pub, which seemed quite full.

“Anything I can do for you, sir?” said the barman who seemed friendly enough, if a little nervous. Harry didn’t blame him. Snape was definitely not a man to be taken lightly and right now was shooting his ‘I would hex you into next week but you’re not worth the bother’ glare at the barman. The barman was distracted though at the sight of Harry and stared at him, seemingly in shock.

“It can’t be Harry Potter!” he exclaimed. He hurried out from the behind the bar, rushed towards Harry, and seized his hand, tears in his eyes. “Upon my word! What an honour. Welcome back Harry Potter, welcome back.” Immediately there was a great scraping of chairs and next moment Harry found himself shaking hands with everyone in the place. If Harry hadn’t been used to controlling his emotions he would be gaping right now. How the hell did these people know his name? He didn’t even know them. What really got to him though, was the fact that everybody *liked* him. He was so used to people acting like he didn’t exist that he found the happy smiles he was receiving quite overwhelming. Luckily, it didn’t last long. Growling in annoyance, Snape grabbed Harry by the arm and steered him from the pub into a narrow alleyway, ignoring the protests from the crowd.

What the hell was that about? demanded Harry of Nemesis.

Abssssolutely no idea. I alwaysss thought humanssss were weird and that clinchessss it, hissed Isis. Harry could do nothing but agree. Those people had definitely been acting oddly. Maybe it was a wizard thing? thought Harry. Screwing up his courage he decided to ask Snape, who was now drawing what Harry presumed was a wand and walking towards a nearby wall.

“Professor Snape? Forgive me for asking, but was that normal behaviour for wizards?” asked Harry. Snape turned to him with an exasperated expression on his face.

“Of course it’s not normal behaviour,” he replied impatiently. “It’s because you’re the bloody boy-who-lived.”

“Because I’m the what?” asked Harry who was now officially bewildered. Snape stared at him in shock.

“Are you telling me you don’t know about you-know-who?” he said.

"No, I don't know who, that's why I'm asking," said Harry a trifle impatiently. Were all wizards completely barmy? Snape was now looking at him with a calculating expression on his face.

"I will tell you, Potter, but it might come as a bit of a shock. Many years ago there was a dark wizard called Voldemort. He began gathering followers and rose in power. Many tried to fight back, of course, but he was gradually taking over. In the end he had almost won. People feared him and didn't put up much of a fight. They even feared to speak his name, preferring to call him You-Know-Who or equally ridiculous titles. Then one night he decided to attack your parents. He turned up at their house and killed them. He then turned his wand on you. Unfortunately for him the curse backfired and hit him instead, defeating him. He is not dead of course, though some believe so. He is in hiding somewhere, too weak to carry on. You on the other hand, became famous for defeating the greatest dark wizard in centuries at the age of one. Does that answer your questions?" he ended dryly. Harry's mind was reeling. In his mind he heard screaming, a flash of green light, laughter and pure pain.

"Potter? Are you listening?" snapped Snape, wrenching Harry from his memories.

"Yes sir," said Harry dazedly. "It just came as a bit of a shock. I was always told that my parents died in a car crash."

"Indeed," sneered Snape but there was not as much malice in it now. "Now are you going to hang around here all day or are you ready to leave?" with that he turned and started tapping the bricks on the wall next to him which moved aside, opening up into a large street, packed with people. "Please keep your scar hidden. I do not want to be mobbed by reporters," said Snape striding through the crowd glaring at everyone who glanced his way. "First stop is Gringotts. We have to pick up your money." Wisely refraining to comment on the fact that he didn't know he had any money, Harry hurried to keep up while hissing comments to Isis and looking at all the amazing things around them.

I am sssorry Harry, hissed Isis. I did not know of thisss boy-who-lived thing. I have heard of Voldemort however. He wasss alsso

a ssssnake sssspeaker. He iss the reason everyone hates snakes sso much. She was cut off by them having reached their destination. They were standing in front of a towering, pure white building. Staring at the wizened creatures that hurried to and fro Harry decided that the first thing he would do with his money was buy a book that would tell him what the hell they were. He would then buy anything he could find on Voldemort. He hated not knowing things and was determined not to be in the dark for any longer. When they reached the main desk Snape started talking, well actually giving orders, to the goblin in charge. Harry let his mind wander until he heard "top secret"... "vault seven hundred and thirteen"... "Dumbledore". They were talking in very low voices meaning that no matter how hard he strained to hear he couldn't, leaving him to ponder the significance of the words. He soon put it out of his mind though, as he was again dragged off, this time to what looked like a small railway. One wild cart ride and two stops at vaults in dark and winding passages later, Snape and Harry, whose pockets were fairly bulging with gold, were pushing themselves once more through the crowds. "Well you may as well go and spend your hard earned money and buy your robes," said Snape sneering. "I have some rare potion ingredients to buy." Without another word he swept off into the crowd leaving a pissed off Harry outside a shop called 'Madame Malkins robes for all occasions.' *Well, I guess I may as well get started,* thought Harry with a sigh. Entering, Harry was accosted by a squat, cheerful witch dressed in mauve. "Hogwarts dear?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Harry. "I need school and everyday robes."

"Of course, dear. If you could just stand on this footstool while we measure you." She led him to the back of the shop where a boy with a pale, pointed face was standing. Madam Malkin stood Harry on a stool next to him, slipped a long robe over his head and began to pin it to the right length.

"Hullo," said the boy, "Hogwarts to?"

"Yeah, my first year," said Harry.

"My fathers next door buying my books and mother's up the street looking at wands," said the boy. He had a bored, drawling voice.

"I thought that you actually had to be there when you by a wand. I mean it's the wand that chooses the wizard, not the other way round," said Harry, slightly confused.

"I know, but try telling her that. She just won't listen. Anyway, what I really want to do is look at racing brooms. I don't know why they don't let first years have their own."

"I know. I think it's something to do with it being unfair to muggle-borns or something. Play Quidditch at all?" asked Harry. Isis had told him all about the sport. He had never seen a game, of course, but he understood the basics, and was determined not to sound like a brainless idiot in front of this boy.

"Yeah I do. It's the best sport in the world if you ask me." They spent a good fifteen minutes discussing the game. Every so often they gave a few directions to the witches doing their robes. Harry was getting loads of everything, thinking that with his newfound money he may as well be well dressed.

"Say, do you know what house you're going to be in?" asked the boy suddenly.

"Not really. No one really knows until they get there, do they? My mother was a Slytherin and my dad was a Gryffindor. So either one of those I suppose."

"Odd combination," remarked the boy. "Where are they by the way?"

"They're dead," said Harry shortly, not wanting to go into it with this boy, even if he did seem quite friendly, though spoiled.

"Oh, I'm sorry for bringing it up," he drawled, though Harry wasn't sure if he was being sincere. "Who did you come with then?"

"I live with my mother's relatives who are muggles, so Professor Snape brought me," replied Harry.

"Really? He's my godfather you know. Hey! Is that a snake?" he had just caught sight of Nemesis who had gotten bored with skulking in Harry's jumper and had decided to see what was going on.

"Yeah, her names Nemesis. She's my pet," said Harry, grinning and ignoring Isis's protests. **(Pet! I am no mere pet, you smug insufferable git!)**

"That's so cool! I'm going to bully father into getting me one," said the boy excitedly. "By the way, what's your name?" Just before Harry could answer, Madame Malkin said, "That's you done, my dear," and he hopped down off the footstool and went to pay for his robes. Harry then decided to go and buy the rest of his stuff as there was no sign of Snape. He visited the apothecary, where he bought all his potions ingredients. He then went and purchased a cauldron, weighing scales and a collapsible telescope. He also decided to get an owl to use as a messenger. The one he bought was pure black with white tipped wings. Harry, after some thought and a lengthy argument with Isis, decided to call her Hedwig. He then went into Flourish and Blotts. Half an hour later he was still there with his nose buried in 'I'm Not Paranoid, I Only Think That Everyone Is Out To Get Me' by Alastor Moody. He had a huge pile of books beside him including 'Curses That Should Be Illegal But Aren't', 'Charms, A Guide To', 'All You Want To Know And Some Things You Don't About Dark Wizards.', 'Excuses To Get You Out Of Any Situation', 'A Pranksters Guide To Embarrassing Jokes', and 'Mind Magic. The Theory Of Wandless Magic.' In the end he regretfully pulled his nose out of 'Nasty Creatures That Are Just Waiting To Kill You' when Snape arrived growling about "pesky brats who disappear whenever they feel like it." Harry then found himself unceremoniously dragged to 'Ollivanders: Makers of Fine Wands since 382 BC.' The shop was really old and dusty and as soon as Harry stepped into it the hairs on the back of his neck stood on end. It reeked of power.

"Good afternoon," said a soft voice. The speaker was an old man with wide, pale eyes shining like moons through the gloom of the shop. "Ah yes. I thought I'd be seeing you here soon Harry Potter. You have your mother's eyes. It seemed only yesterday she was in here herself, buying her first wand. Ten and a quarter inches long, swishy, made of willow. Nice wand for charm work." Mr Ollivander had come so close that they were almost nose to nose. "And that's where..." he touched the lightening scar on Harry's forehead with a long, white finger. "I'm sorry to say I sold the wand that did it," he said softly. "Thirteen and a half inches. Yew. Powerful wand, very powerful, and in the wrong

hands... well, if I had known what that wand was going out into the world to do..."

Behind Harry, Snape shifted uncomfortably which drew Ollivander's attention to him instead.

"Severus Snape. It is a pleasure to see you again." All he got was a sneer in return. "Mahogany, twelve inches. Quite bendy. Excellent for curses."

"Indeed," replied Snape, glaring.

"Right then Mr. Potter. Let me see." Ollivander pulled a long tape measure out of his pocket. "Which is your wand arm?" he asked.

"Actually, I'm ambidextrous," said Harry offhandedly. Both men stared. Finally Ollivander said,

"Well then. That is very unusual. There hasn't been an ambidextrous wizard or witch in over a century. It is very rare in the magical world. Well, we may as well start finding you a wand then." With that Ollivander was off flitting around the shelves taking down boxes.

"Try this one Mr. Potter. Beachwood and dragon heartstring. Nice and flexible. Just take it and give it a wave." Harry did as he was told but absolutely nothing happened.

"Try this one then," said Ollivander, handing him another wand. Nothing happened then either. In fact, Harry had to try out over twenty wands before he got the one he wanted.

"I wonder now-yes, why not- unusual combination-ebony and phoenix feather, eleven inches, nice and supple. One of the most powerful wands I have. Give it a wave boy." said Ollivander, handing him a sleek, black wand. As soon as Harry took it he felt a warmth in his fingers. He raised the wand and brought it swishing down through the dusty air and a stream of silver and gold sparks shot from the end like fireworks. Ollivander cried, "Oh bravo! Yes indeed, oh, very good. Well, well, well... how curious... how very curious."

“Excuse me, but what’s curious?” asked Harry while drawing out his money bag.

Mr Ollivander fixed Harry with a pale stare. “I remember every wand I ever sold, Mr Potter. Every single wand. It so happens that the phoenix whose tail feather is in your wand, gave another feather- just one other. It is curious indeed that you should be destined for this wand when it’s brother- why it’s brother gave you that scar.”

“Are you telling me that he’s holding the brother of Voldemort’s wand?” said Snape, incredulously, shocked into speaking. Up until then he had remained silent, glowering at everything in sight.

“Yes indeed,” replied Ollivander, a bit too happily for Harry’s liking. “Very curious, but the wand choose the wizard, remember. I think we must expect great things from you, Mr Potter. Very great things.”

Harry was enthralled. It had always been his ambition in life to become powerful and make everyone sit up and take notice. In one day he had found out that he was famous and that he was capable of becoming a very great wizard. Things couldn’t get much better in Harry’s opinion as he was yet again dragged from the shop by a pale looking Professor. Harry was still mulling over the day after Snape had dropped him off at the Dursleys. Curled up in his bed reading one of his many books, he felt satisfied. He was that much closer to fulfilling his ambition.

Chapter 5

Harry's last month with the Dursleys was hilarious. The Dursleys let him do what ever he wanted so Harry had taken great delight in tormenting Dudley by never letting him watch TV. The rest of his time was spent reading. He had learnt to cast loads of simple spells with his wand. Although it was very different from wandless magic it was also much easier. Harry decided to keep practising without a wand, as it would probably be handy in a duel or something. It also increased his concentration and understanding of magic.

On the 1st of September Harry woke up at around 5 o'clock in the morning and was too excited to go back to sleep. He got dressed and then double-checked his stuff to make sure he hadn't forgotten anything. He had arduously charmed his trunk to be feather light the night before, as he didn't feel like lugging it around all day. Two hours later Harry sat grinning in the back seat of the Dursley's car with Dudley whimpering beside him. Harry had managed to threaten Uncle Vernon into driving him to Kings Cross Station. Uncle Vernon had then decided to make it a family outing and Harry had a sneaky suspicion that as soon as he left the Dursleys would have a massive party. After all, they'd be getting rid of him for nine months. Harry was definitely not going to come back over the Christmas holidays.

They reached the station at half past ten. As soon as Harry had got his trunk out of the boot the Dursleys drove off as fast as they possibly could. Harry thought he heard cheers coming from inside. Shrugging Harry walked to the platform between 9 and 10. Snape hadn't told him how to get onto the platform (*typical* thought Harry, *I bet he couldn't wait for me to make a fool of myself*) but luckily Harry had read about it in *Hogwarts: A History*, one of the most boring books he had ever set eyes on. After going through the barrier Harry pressed through the crowd until he found an empty compartment at the end of the train. Picking up his trunk he found that it was suddenly much heavier. He glanced around and saw two redheaded twins looking at him and laughing. Smirking Harry re-cast the wandless feather-light spell and lifted his trunk into the compartment. The twins stared in shock. *Ha! Serves them right. No one pranks me and gets away with it*, thought Harry, smirking. After he had settled himself into the compartment the twins came up to him and said,

“Sorry about...”

“The whole trunk thing. It was just meant to be...”

“A joke. It didn’t work quite as we...”

“Intended it to though. This is Fred and I’m George by the way. Who are you?” They said this all very fast and Harry had trouble keeping up with them.

“My name’s Harry Potter,” said Harry. The two boys gawped at him.

“Blimey,” said one twin. “Are you *the* Harry Potter?”

“Yeah,” said Harry feeling a bit uncomfortable. He thought that he may as well get used to it though, as it would probably happen a lot.

“Wow!” said George in awe. Before he could say anything else though, their mother called them and they left after a last look at Harry.

After the train had started to move the boy from the robe shop walked into the compartment Harry was sitting in.

“Oh, hello. Do you mind if I sit here? All the other compartments are full,” he asked.

“Sure,” replied Harry.

Sitting down Draco prompted, “You never did tell me your name?”

“Oh, sorry. I’m Harry Potter.”

“Really? I never would have guessed. You seem too, well, too Slytherin for the wizarding world’s golden boy,” drawled Draco. “It must be awfully useful though. You could probably do whatever you want.”

“Actually, since I live with Muggles, I only found out I was famous a month ago. I’m still getting used to the idea,” replied Harry.

“Poor you living with dirty Muggles. It’s bad enough having mudbloods at school with us, but living with them?” said Draco in contempt.

“My relatives are the worst people you could ever meet. Some Muggles are okay though,” said Harry, reasonably. “Why do you hate muggle-borns? After all, they’re still magical.”

“They may have magic but they weren’t brought up knowing our ways. They either end up knowing nothing at all, or, even worse, thinking they know it all but always missing the finer points of our society. I don’t have that much against them though. I mean I hate Muggles, I hate mudbloods, I hate muggle-lovers, I hate Gryffindors, I hate Hufflepuffs and I just about tolerate Ravenclaws. To sum it all up, I hate anyone who isn’t a Slytherin, and even then I often don’t like them much,” said Draco shrugging.

“My mother was a muggle-born,” said Harry, coldly.

“Yeah, I know. But she was a *Slytherin* muggle-born. It makes all the difference. My father was quite good friends with her actually. They were in the same year and he always respected her. According to him, she was the epitome of Slytherin. She had enough cunning and guile to pull off being a mudblood in that house, and that says a lot. She was powerful too, very powerful.”

At that moment the twins walked in again.

“Hey, Harry!” said Fred or George, Harry couldn’t tell which. Just then they caught sight of Draco.

“Malfoy,” they said, glaring at him. “What are you doing here?”

“What does it look like, Weasleys? Although I must say it’s a surprise to see you here, how long did your parents have to go hungry to pay for your school fees?” said Draco sneering at them. Before the argument could escalate any further Harry asked,

“Have you guys ever met each other before?”

“No,” they replied, confused.

“Well then, stop leaping to conclusions then,” said Harry. “I am not in the mood to listen to you fighting, so can you just spare the arguments ‘till we get to Hogwarts?”

“Well, I suppose...” said George.

“It wouldn’t hurt,” agreed Fred.

“Just as long as they don’t insult me,” said Draco. “This doesn’t mean I like you though,” he said to the twins.

“No fear. Whoever heard of a Weasley and a Malfoy friends? We’ll settle for civil acquaintances,” replied the twins, laughing. “Anyway, we gotta go. Lee Jordan’s managed to sneak a giant tarantula in. See ya later Harry, Malfoy.”

After they had gone the snack lady came by and Harry and Draco bought as much as they could. After pigging themselves out for a while they began talking Quidditch. They were just in the middle of discussing which was the better team, the Falmouth Falcons, or the Wimbourne Wasps when the compartment door opened again, to allow a red-haired boy to swagger in. Harry took a dislike to him immediately.

“Is it true?” he said. “They’re saying up and down the train that Harry Potter’s in this compartment.”

“Yes, it is true. Now will you kindly get out,” said Draco, sneering.

“No one asked you. Just keep out of it. Who are you anyway,” said the boy rudely.

“Draco Malfoy. No need to ask who you are. My father told me all the Weasleys have red hair, freckles and more children than they can afford,” said Draco, maliciously.

“I didn’t ask you, Malfoy. I’m sure Harry can answer for himself,” said Weasley. Turning to Harry he said, “The name’s Ron Weasley. I wouldn’t hang out with Malfoy if I were you. They’re all Slytherins and dark wizards.”

“Why hello *Ronald*. I’m afraid I have to agree with my friend Draco here and say get the hell out,” said Harry, haughtily. “I can pick my own friends. And never call me Harry again. I am definitely not, and never will be your friend. Got it?”

At this Ron Weasley went bright red with embarrassment and anger and stormed out of the compartment.

“That got rid of him quickly,” remarked Draco. “That boy is such a prat and just doesn’t seem to take a hint. Bet he’s a Gryffindor.”

“Well I definitely hope I get into Slytherin then. I definitely don’t want to be in the same house as him,” said Harry.

“I know what you mean,” drawled Draco. “Where’s your snake by the way?”

“You mean Nemesis. She’s right here, curled around my arm. I think she’s sleeping though. Please don’t tell anyone about her. Snakes aren’t actually allowed in.”

“Don’t worry, I won’t. If you get into Slytherin it won’t matter anyway. She could wander around no problem. Slytherins never care about rules and we never betray someone from our own house to a teacher,” said Draco.

The two of them spent the rest of the time chatting about unimportant things until the train finally started slowing down. Shrugging on his robes Harry asked how they were sorted into different houses.

“I’m not sure actually. My father refused to tell me no matter how much I whined. He did say something about a hat, though that doesn’t really help much,” answered Draco, frustrated.

The train finally stopped and people began pushing their way towards the doors and out onto a tiny, dark platform.

“Firs’ years, Firs’ years over here,” boomed a loud voice. The speaker was a huge man who was twice as tall as everyone else. Following him the first years made their way across a huge lake towards a vast castle with many turrets and towers. They clambered up a

passageway coming out at last on to smooth, damp grass right in front of the main doors.

“Everyone here? Good,” said their guide who raised a gigantic fist and knocked three times on the castle door.

Chapter 6

"Everyone here? Good," said their guide and knocked three times on the castle door. The door swung open at once. A tall, black-haired witch in emerald green robes stood there. She had a very stern face and Harry's first thought was that this was not someone to cross. His second thought was that she must have actually been standing next to the door waiting to open it for her to have done it so quickly.

"The first years, professor McGonagall," said Hagrid, gesturing to the nervous eleven-year olds behind him.

"Thank you, Hagrid; I will take them from here."

She pulled the door wide and the first years filed in. They followed McGonagall across the flagged stone floor and crowded into a small empty chamber off the great hall.

"Welcome to Hogwarts," said the Professor. "The start of term banquet will begin shortly, but first you will be sorted into your houses. While you are here your houses will be like your family within Hogwarts. You will have classes with the rest of your house, sleep in your house dormitory and spend free time in your house common-room." Harry had read about the four houses so he just tuned out and started looking around him. Almost everyone seemed absolutely petrified. Either that or looking confident and smug like Draco. After McGonagall left the chamber everyone started talking about how they were going to be sorted. Harry cracked up laughing when he heard Ron Weasley say that they would have to wrestle a troll.

"Weasley, they would never make us do that. First of all, pretty much everyone would end up dead; second, it would hardly tell them which house you should be in; and thirdly, I doubt they would go to the trouble of capturing a troll just for your benefit," sneered Draco.

"If you're so clever, why don't you tell us what the sorting ceremony is then," replied Weasley, reddening.

"We have to try on a hat," said Harry in a bored voice.

"Yeah right Potter. I would never fall for that!"

Before Harry could answer Professor McGonagall returned and lead them into the great hall. Once they were at the top, facing the other students, she placed a ragged hat on a stool in front of them. The hall was staring at it in complete silence. The hat twitched and near the brim a rip opened – and the hat began to sing.

“Oh, you may not think I’m pretty,

But don’t judge on what you see,

I’ll eat myself if you can find

A smarter hat than me.

You can keep your bowlers black,

Your top hats sleek and tall,

For I’m the Hogwart’s sorting hat

And I can cap them all.

There’s nothing hidden in your head

The sorting hat can’t see,

So try me on and I will tell you

Where you ought to be.

You might belong in Gryffindor,

Where dwell the brave of heart,

Their daring, nerve and chivalry

Set Gryffindor apart.

You might belong in Hufflepuff,

Where they are just and loyal,

Those patient Hufflepuffs are true,
And unafraid of toil.
Or yet in wise old Ravenclaw,
If you've a steady mind,
Where those of wit and learning,
Will always find their kind.
Or perhaps in Slytherin
You'll make your true friends,
Those cunning folk use any means
To achieve their ends.
So put me on! Don't be afraid!
And don't get in a flap!
You're in safe hands (though I have none)
For I'm a thinking cap!

The whole hall burst into applause as the hat finished its song. Harry and Draco both smirked at Ron Weasley who turned red and glared at them. Professor McGonagall now stepped forward holding a long roll of parchment.

"When I call your name, you will put on the hat and sit on the stool to be sorted," she said. "Abbott, Hannah."

A pink-faced girl stumbled out of line, put on the hat, and sat down. A moment's pause -

"Hufflepuff!" shouted the hat. It continued like that for quite a while with "Feral, Louisa" getting into Slytherin, along with "Bulstrode Millicent", "Crabbe, Vincent" and "Goyle, Gregory." When Draco's

name was called out he swaggered forward and got his wish at once. The hat had barely touched his head before it screamed “Slytherin!” Malfoy went to sit with Crabbe and Goyle, looking pleased with himself. He mouthed, “I’ll save you a seat,” to Harry who smirked back.

When McGonagall finally called out “Potter, Harry” whispers broke out in the hall.

“*Potter*, did she say?”

“*The* Harry Potter?”

“You’d think he’d be a bit *taller*, wouldn’t you?”

Rolling his eyes Harry stepped forward and strolled up to the stool. The last thing Harry saw was the Hall full of people craning to get a good look at him. Next second he was looking at the black inside of the Hat. He waited.

“Hmm,” said a small voice in his ear. “Difficult, very difficult. Plenty of courage, I see. Intelligent to. There’s talent, oh my goodness, yes – and a nice thirst to prove yourself, now that’s interesting...So where shall I put you? Hmm, you’re cunning. And quite ruthless. Oh, you have the potential to become great, very great. And there’s only one place that will help you on the way. Yes, better be Slytherin!”

Taking off the hat, Harry saw the whole hall staring at him, shell-shocked. Then Draco stood up and started clapping and soon the whole Slytherin table was giving him the loudest cheer yet. Several of the Slytherins got up and shook his hand, welcoming him to their house. The rest of the hall just muttered darkly to themselves while Dumbledore looked worried. The older Slytherins were positively delighted. (“Yet another way to annoy the Gryffindors,”), though Snape’s reaction was the most amusing. He just sat there clutching the arms of his chair and staring wide-eyed at Harry, obviously suffering from shock and disbelief. Once everybody was sorted Dumbledore stood up and said a few random words and then the feast began. Draco and Harry began chatting to a ghost sitting next to them who called himself the Bloody Baron.

"If you need any help with Peeves, our resident Poltergeist, just come to me. I'm the only one he listens to. We don't want to lose Slytherin points. We've won the house cup six years in a row now," said the Baron in a silky, dangerous voice.

"Yeah," drawled an older student. "The Gryffs are so jealous, and when they're jealous they lose their tempers even more easily, which makes them lose even more house points. You'd think the idiots would have figured that out by now; seems like they're stupider than I thought."

"Why does Peeves only listen to you?" Harry asked the Bloody Baron while helping himself to some mashed potatoes.

"That is for me to know and you to find out," replied the Baron, smirking. Just then Harry looked past a teacher's turban straight into Snape's eyes and a searing pain went across his scar. It took all of Harry's self-control not to cry out.

"Who is that teacher with the turban?" Harry asked, slightly shakily. His scar had never done that before.

"Oh, I think that's Professor Quirrell, the Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher," replied a rather pretty, dark-haired girl with purple eyes. "I'm Blaise Zabini by the way."

"Nice to meet you," said Harry politely. He chatted with Blaise for a while about the other teachers and ways to avoid being caught out by them. Blaise seemed to know quite a lot.

"Everyone says that Snape is the hardest teacher but only if you're not in Slytherin. He's very powerful and intelligent and deserves respect. He's the potions master but it's common knowledge that he wants Quirrell's position. He would probably be much better at it to," said Blaise, piling her plate high with mounds of food.

"Yeah, Quirrell seems to be afraid of his own shadow," agreed Harry. Beside them Draco and Louisa were discussing the break in at Gringotts and arguing about how the criminal had managed to get away.

"I'm telling you, the security system at Gringotts isn't that good, it's just exaggerated," said Draco arrogantly.

"Come on. You know that's not true. It must have been done by a powerful dark wizard. Everyone says so. They have the most elaborate charms and curses guarding the building. Hell, they even have dragons by the top security vaults," replied Louisa, waving her spoon around in agitation. Before they could continue Dumbledore stood up and gave one of the strangest speeches Harry had ever heard. He had absolutely no idea what Dumbledore meant by "Nitwit, Blubber, Oddment, Tweak," and telling them to stay away from the third floor unless they had a death wish seemed a bit far fetched as well.

"Why the hell did he say that?" asked Harry, glancing at the older students.

"Because he's completely insane. Most people think he's a genius but all Slytherins know that's not true," replied one of the Prefects languidly. "Anyway, all first years please follow me, I'll show you the way to the common room." Pushing their way through the crowds they were lead down into the dungeons through winding corridors and twisting steps. Just when Harry was beginning to think it would never end they stopped outside a bare stone wall.

"The passwords 'pureblood', don't forget it," instructed their guide. A hidden door in the stone wall slid open and everyone stepped through it. The Slytherin common room was a long, low underground room. A fire was crackling under an elaborately carved mantelpiece ahead of them. The rest of the room was quite a shock. The walls were covered in posters of famous singers and Quidditch players and someone had placed dozens of bean bags on the floor alongside the fancy chairs and sofas. It brightened up the room considerably. There was also a huge sound system in the corner and it was blaring out music by Celestina Warbeck.

"Welcome to Slytherin," said the Prefect. "I am Lucretia Parks. In Slytherin there are a certain set of rules you must follow. 1. Never get caught. 2. Never betray a fellow Slytherin to someone outside your

house, and 3. Always annoy the hell out of the Gryffindors. If anyone breaks these there will be hell to pay.

Slytherins stick together, we have to. Everybody else hates us and thinks we're evil. No teacher except Snape will like you. No student outside our House will speak a civil word to you. The only way to survive is to fight back. On the wall here is the Slytherin code of conduct. One hundred and one rules in all. Follow these rules and you should fit right in. Now, being Slytherins we never leave things to chance. We older students have figured out a way to win the house cup. It is a very complicated plan but since you're new all you guys have to do is watch the students from other houses and see which are the most likely to respond physically when baited. That will make them lose house points. Preferably annoy them when you know Professor Snape is nearby, he always takes off loads of points. Got that? Okay. Girl dormitories that way, boys that way." With that Lucretia disappeared and the first years boys climbed down a staircase on the right and into the room with '1st years' written on it. Too tired to do anything but sleep the boys got into bed and were out like a light before their heads touched their pillows.

Deep down, far beneath the rest of the school, a sallow faced, hook nosed teacher was sitting by himself, clutching a glass of whisky, a impenetrable expression on his face and a manipulative gleam in his eyes. *Lily's son*, he thought. *Defeater of the Dark Lord. Interesting, but what the hell am I supposed to do? He's powerful, no doubt about it, and he's not all light by any means. Yes, it is definitely **interesting**,*

Chapter 7

The next morning Harry was woken up by Isis hissing in his ear. Needless to say it was not a pleasant experience.

Go away. Leave me alone, mumbled Harry, turning over and trying to get back to sleep.

Risse and shine sssleeping beauty! You better get up right now 'cos I'm hungry and don't want to misssss breakfasts, hissed Isis, poking him with her tail. It took a bit more persuasion, but after Isis threatened to bite him, Harry decided that maybe it was time to get up. Crawling out of bed Harry stumbled to the showers. The dormitories were all massive. There were 5 four-poster beds with green and silver hangings. There were a couple of chairs and tables surrounding a fire, all green, silver and black. Harry distractedly contemplated changing the colour scheme. It got a bit monotonous after a while.

Do you have to be so wide-awake in the mornings? It's annoying as hell, grumbled Harry while Isis hummed the theme tune in 'Shreck'. The only answer Harry got was Isis doubling the volume.

You do realise you are tone deaf? asked Harry.

Nothing ssstandss in the way of a true mussician, hissed Isis, switching to the new single by the Weird Sisters. Rolling his eyes Harry made his way up to the common room. Looking blearily around Harry saw that Draco was already there.

"Finally! I've been waiting for you for an age. Hurry, or we're going to be late for breakfast," said Draco and they set off. By following an older student they managed to make it to the great hall without getting lost, which Harry felt to be an amazing achievement. Slipping into a seat next to Louisa Feral, Harry began eating his breakfast, still half asleep and wincing at the any loud noises. A short while later Blaise Zabini bounced in and grinned round at everybody.

"Good morning!" she said cheerily. "I am so excited. Our first day of school!"

“Oh Merlin, not you too! Why is everyone so hyperactive in the mornings?” groaned Harry.

“I’ve got some bad news for you my friend,” drawled Draco. “We’re not hyperactive; you’re just not a morning person. Honestly, I’ve seen slimy things living under rocks with more energy than you.”

“Hey! I’ll be fine once I’ve had some coffee,” said Harry, clutching his cup as if it were a lifesaver. Just then a Prefect came by with their timetables. Grabbing a last piece of toast Draco, Harry and Blaise decided to leave so as to get to their first lesson, charms, on time. Whispers followed Harry all through the school. It was decidedly unnerving. Thankfully they soon reached their classroom and went inside. It wasn’t only the students that stared at him though, but the teachers as well. Professor Flitwick, the charms teacher, fell off his chair when he reached Harry’s name in the register. Harry had a sneaky suspicion that he was Flitwick’s new favourite student, as when he ‘accidentally’ levitated Weasley to the ceiling instead of his feather, all Flitwick did was give Slytherin 10 points for such a powerful charm. Unfortunately, his fame didn’t always work in his favour. Professor McGonagall acted very cold towards Harry and didn’t give him any points, even when he was the only one who successfully transfigured his matchstick into a needle. Most of the other teachers treated him as they did other students, though they were stricter on Slytherins in general. The one lesson that all the Slytherins were looking forward to was Potions. And Harry had to say, it definitely lived up to his expectations. Snape, like Flitwick, started the lesson by taking the register but didn’t pause by Harry’s name. After he had given his ‘welcome’ speech he said,

“Potter, what would I get if I added powdered root of asphodel to an infusion of wormwood?”

Immediately a bushy haired girl’s hand shot up so fast Harry was surprised it wasn’t burnt by air friction. Harry wasn’t actually completely sure of the answer but in his view, confidence is everything, so he smirked and replied,

“It makes a sleeping draught so powerful that it is known as the draught of living death, sir.”

Snape nodded and said in an approving voice, "Glad to see you've opened a book before coming here. Five points to Slytherin." Then, reverting to his normal sneering tone of voice, he said, "Weasley, where would you look if I told you to find me a bezoar?"

"I don't know," replied Weasley, while the bushy haired girl practically stood up in her seat waving her hand in the air.

"Five points from Gryffindor," sneered Snape. "Now let's try again. What's the difference between Monkshood and Wolfsbane?"

"How should I know!" said Weasley, angrily.

"Temper, temper. That's another five points you've lost for Gryffindor," replied Snape with relish. Things didn't improve for the Gryffindors as the lesson continued. Snape swept through the room praising the Slytherins, especially Draco and Harry, and taking points off the Gryffindors if they so much as moved wrong. By the end of the lesson the Gryffindors had lost thirty-five points while the Slytherins had gained fifteen and were almost in hysterics with laughter. Watching Snape mete out insults was a lesson all in itself. He seemed to have honed his skills over the years so that now one glare was enough to quell even the most boisterous student. Unfortunately, it didn't seem to have a lasting effect because as soon as the lesson ended Ron Weasley caught up with Harry and angrily started complaining.

"You think you're so great just 'cos you're famous. Your parents are probably turning in their graves at the thought of you in Slytherin, you traitor!" He probably would have continued if Harry hadn't interrupted.

"For your information, Weasley, my mother was a Slytherin," said Harry in a dangerous voice. "I'd keep a low profile if I were you. Don't want people knowing my shoes cost more than your entire wardrobe." With that Harry swept off, but not before he turned the weasels hair bright green with silver stripes. Growling in frustration and embarrassment, Ron Weasley slouched off towards his next class, amidst the laughter of the watching Slytherins. Just then, the Weasley twins turned up.

"Cool prank," said George.

"Maybe ickle Ronniekins won't be so insufferable from now on," grinned Fred.

"Doubt it though."

"So how are you doing?" asked Fred.

"Alright I suppose. I love it in Slytherin," replied Harry, wanting to see what their reaction would be.

"Rather you than me," said Fred conspiratorially. "It shocked us all I tell you."

"Anyway, we gotta go. Lee Jordan reckons he found a new secret passage way. See you round." They left, probably to create havoc and mayhem somewhere else in the castle.

Harry was actually quite pleased that the twins were still talking to him. Yeah, they were Gryffindors and all, but they were still fun.

Chapter 8

The rest of the week passed in pretty much the same way as the first day. Harry, Draco and Blaise, who they were friends with, spent their time getting used to Hogwarts. What with all the trick staircases, trap doors and maze-like corridors it was quite dangerous to walk around the castle and getting to the classrooms on time took ages. Spending time in the Slytherin common room was also quite a risky business. In Slytherin it was a rare thing for someone to tell the truth (Code of Conduct number 95: The truth should always be guarded by a bodyguard of lies) and no Slytherin could ever let his or her guard down. To show your real feelings was a sign of weakness, (Code number 40: Your real feelings are a precious thing indeed. And they should be better guarded than Gringotts) and the first years had to quickly adjust.

Each Slytherin had one or two friends whom they could trust with anything (for Harry this was Draco and Blaise), but other than that you were on your own. No one did anything for free; they would always expect to be repaid. Allegiances between Slytherins were constantly changing and fights broke out regularly. Almost everyday Harry saw students duelling in the middle of the common room with other Slytherins placing bets on who would win. Harry had already won 32 galleons in this way.

Slytherin hierarchy was very confusing. Non-Slytherins thought it was based purely on money and family connections. This, while it influenced people's attitudes, was not all. Even the poorest Slytherin could rise to the top. It just took a lot of hard work. You needed to be cunning, devious and a hell of a good dueller. Knowing this, Harry, Draco and Blaise had decided to learn how to duel. Blaise's mother was an Auror so Blaise was already quite good and so began teaching the other two. All of them knew a fair amount of hexes and curses but that wasn't enough. Harry soon found that practising spells on your own was very different from trying to cast a spell while aiming properly, dodging curses and trying to get your opponent to let their guard down.

Harry was set on improving and insisted on practising every spare moment and spent hours in the library researching spells. Draco, who

wouldn't be seen dead in the library and only liked using dangerous and bordering on illegal spells which were only found in the restricted section, spent his time terrorizing other first years especially Hufflepuffs, though he preferred Weasley to any other victim. Harry was now very good friends with both Draco and Blaise, and all three of them baited Ronald Weasley as soon as they saw him. Weasley had lost around fifty-three points from Gryffindor since the beginning of term and his housemates were not very happy with him. Out of all the first years he was the easiest to annoy. The Ravenclaws were too bookish to care and the Hufflepuffs tended to run away from any Slytherin they saw. Draco found this extremely funny and made a point of tripping up any Hufflepuff he met. Harry and Blaise also found it rather amusing, but they only annoyed people who annoyed the hell out of them, such as Weasley. Every day Ronniekins would have pranks played on him. Like when Harry charmed some cupcakes to make Weasley dress up as a girl for a whole day. The whole school was laughing about it for ages. It had been Blaise's idea but Harry carried it out, as he was the best at charms. Draco sulked for a while because he wanted to make it more malicious but cheered up after he saw how humiliated Ronald was. The three of them had now pretty much started a full-scale war with the Gryffindors, especially Weasley, Finnegan and Granger. Those three seemed to be good friends though Harry suspected they only put up with Granger to improve their marks. So far the Slytherins were winning, as they had managed to disable any pranks the Gryffindors set for them. Unfortunately (or fortunately as the case may be) they only had one lesson with the Gryffindors. That is until they saw a notice saying that flying lessons would begin that Friday and they would be having it with the Gryffs.

On Friday morning all the Slyths traipsed into the Great Hall for breakfast. They arrived as the post came. The first time it happened, Harry had got quite a shock. After all, in the muggle world it is highly unusual for thousands of owls to appear all at once. Harry never got any post, but Hedwig came regularly to steal some toast and say hello. On their way past the Gryffindor table Harry and Draco saw Longbottom get a package from his family. Harry, not knowing what it was, sauntered over to look at it.

“It’s a Remembrall!” Longbottom was saying excitedly. “It tells you if there’s something you’ve forgotten to do. Look, you hold it tight like this and if it turns red it means you’ve forgotten-oh...” His face fell, because the Remembrall had suddenly glowed scarlet. While Longbottom was busy trying to remember what he had forgotten, Ronald Weasley snatched it out of his hands.

“How idiotic, who wants a ball like that,” he said cruelly while the Remembrall turned red. “It doesn’t even tell you what you’ve forgotten.”

“Hey! That’s mine, give it here!” said Longbottom attempting to get it back. Weasley just laughed and held it out of his reach.

Harry felt a little sorry for Longbottom who looked crestfallen at this. All the other first year Gryffindors were doing nothing to help him. Never needing an excuse to annoy Weasley, Harry stepped up and grabbed the ball out of his hands, drawling,

“Jealous Weasley? This thing probably cost more than your whole house, sorry, hovel put together.”

“Stay out of this Potter!” said Weasley angrily.

“What an original comeback, Ronniekins,” smirked Harry, watching in amusement while Weasley flushed bright red from embarrassment. He’d picked up the name from Fred and George. Seeing McGonagall coming towards them Harry decided to gracefully retreat and tossed the ball back to Longbottom while turning round towards his own table. Walking away Harry couldn’t resist throwing one last comment at the redhead.

“Oh and by the way Ronnie, the Remembrall probably turned red to remind you to take your head out of your arse.” At this Draco, who lived for making trouble and had come up to see what the fuss was about, burst out laughing, along with the rest of the Slytherins that had heard.

After breakfast all the first year Slytherins headed down to the Quidditch pitch. They made a point of being early so as to get the best brooms. Harry had heard Fred and George complain about them

saying that they started to vibrate if you flew too high, or always flew slightly to the left. Muttering in disgust they stood by their chosen brooms.

"My *Great-Great-Grandfather* had a better broom than this," complained Pansy Parkinson, stepping round Gregory and Vincent who were rolling on the ground fighting over who got which broom.

"You mean cave men or Weasleys have better brooms than these," corrected Draco, sneering at the things in contempt.

"Cut it out, you two," drawled Louisa to the two fighting boys. "The Gryffs will be coming soon and we can't let them see you fighting. They'd probably tell a teacher."

As it turned out, the only Gryffindor who came on time was Longbottom, looking decidedly nervous at being surrounded by Slytherins. The rest of the Gryffindors turned up ten minutes after the teacher, Madam Hooch, arrived. Much to the Slytherins delight she promptly took off five points from everyone who turned up late. She seemed to have a slight grudge against the Gryffindors, especially Ronald Weasley. After telling him that his grip was completely wrong and lecturing the Gryffindors in general for being "restless and inattentive," Harry decided that Hooch was his new favourite teacher.

"Hold your hand over your brooms and say 'up!' in a firm voice," she said, still scowling in irritation.

Harry's broom came to him immediately, as did Draco's. Blaise was having some difficulty so she pulled out her wand and said in a threatening voice,

"Now listen here! If you don't jump into my hand I will curse you into next year and I'll make sure you die a slow and horrible death. Got it? Now UP!" Surprisingly, it seemed to work and Blaise climbed on smirking in satisfaction. Most students managed it on around their 4th try, although Grangers just rolled over while Longbottom's didn't move at all. Ron Weasley, Harry was pleased to notice, didn't manage until the 5th try. In fact, his broom shot up so fast it hit Weasley smack it the face. *Maybe brooms, like horses, can tell if you*

are afraid, thought Harry, watching Longbottom quaver out “Up.” in a terrified voice.

“On my whistle you will kick off from the ground, hover a bit and then lean forward to come back down,” shouted Hooch. “Three-, two-,”

But Longbottom, nervous and jumpy, pushed off hard before the whistle had touched Madam Hooch’s lips. Surely a school broom shouldn’t go so out of control, thought Harry while the teacher screamed up at the unfortunate boy. Finally, around fifty metres up in the air, Longbottom’s broom bucked him off and he plummeted to the ground. Without really thinking Harry grabbed his broom and pushed off. He shot into the air with exhilaration, intent on catching the falling boy.

“Come on, Come on,” he muttered, pushing his broom to its limits. Five metres from the ground he caught Longbottom and managed to break his fall and bring them both safely to the ground, where Longbottom promptly fainted. Immediately Madam Hooch ran over to them shouting,

“Wonderful flying! Simply brilliant! I will talk to Professor Snape about this. Amazing!”

“How come it reacted like that?” wondered Louisa Feral with a look of interest on her face. Harry had to agree with her.

“Professor. Can you please check the brooms for tampering? Surely they don’t normally behave so erratically?” asked Harry, wanting to make sure that his broom wouldn’t react like that.

“Normal brooms don’t,” she agreed, “but these brooms are about as reliable as an ordinary branch and a bunch of twigs. Now, this boy needs medical attention. No one move while I’m gone.” With that she hurried off towards the castle, supporting Longbottom beside her. As soon as she was out of earshot Draco said,

“What the hell did you do that for?” The other Slytherins nodded in agreement.

"Come on, he could of died! And it's not like he deserves it. Unlike Weasley or someone," retorted Harry, annoyed.

"Still! He's a Gryffindor Harry!" exclaimed Draco. "All Gryffindors are worthless."

This was definitely the wrong thing to say. Harry immediately froze and began reaching for his wand while glaring at Draco.

"Are you insulting my father?" asked Harry in a deceptively calm voice. "He was Gryffindor, too. He died trying to save me."

Draco and Harry glared at each other until finally Draco broke eye contact.

"No, of course not. That's not what I meant," he said nervously. "I'm sorry Harry." At this everyone watching was struck dumb from shock. A *Malfoy* apologising? They were willing to bet that had never happened in at least a century.

"It's okay, I guess," said Harry relaxing. "I'm just a bit touchy where my parents are concerned. Sorry."

The two students continued talking and gradually everyone else did, too. At last Hooch came back with a recovered Neville and continued the lesson, but no one was allowed on a broom. Instead she lectured them on safety regulations. Harry was not sorry when the bell rang for the beginning of lunch. He, Blaise and Draco strolled off towards the lake. As he passed, Harry nodded and offered a small smile to Neville, who was still looking extremely shaken. Neville looked surprised then smiled tentatively back and hurried after the disappearing Gryffindors. Turning back to his friends Harry continued discussing various ways of turning Ronald Weasley into a toad so that the only way to break the spell was for someone to kiss him. Which was very unlikely to happen, in Harry's opinion.

Chapter 9

The next few weeks Harry was finally beginning to get used to Hogwarts and the time simply flew by. Often literally. After Harry's "spectacular" flying, Madame Hooch had talked to Snape and he had blackmailed (or bribed, Harry didn't know which) the Headmaster into lifting the first-year ban. This was quite a feat, as Dumbledore only favoured Gryffindors and had seemed to have taken a dislike to Harry, no doubt for being famous and in Slytherin.

When Blaise and Draco heard they were ecstatic (after a bit of jealous sulking on Draco's part) and had been bragging about it to anyone they met, especially Weasley, who was enraged at the thought of "that show-off Potter" being the youngest Seeker in a century.

Harry's first practice was quite a challenge. After listening to Marcus Flint's speech on what curses he would use on Harry if it turned out he was wasting his time, Harry kicked off from the ground. Flint then threw golf balls around the place ("bloody muggle things, ah well, we have nothing else") trying his level best to make Harry drop them. Unfortunately for Harry, he caught them all, which made Flint decide to use another tactic. He began to ferociously pelt Harry with the balls, as hard as he possibly could. After Harry had nearly been beheaded four times, Flint grudgingly stopped, but only because he had run out things to throw.

"Well, Snape was right about you. You definitely made it on the team. Unfortunately, we already have a Seeker, Terence Higgs. However, since he's absolutely useless, we'll just have to make him have a timely accident before the game. I'll get working on that. Meanwhile, you'll be our replacement Seeker and you're to turn up at every single practice, got it? I expect to see you here tomorrow, five o'clock. Now scram!"

Harry obediently began making his way to the castle, inwardly cringing at the thought of getting up at dawn. Hell, he would get up closer to five o'clock in the *evening* if he had his way. Unfortunately, he was under no delusions of what would happen to him if he failed to

turn up. Harry desperately wanted all his limbs intact, so he decided it would be a very good idea to come at the right time.

When Draco heard of the ungodly hour Harry had to get up, all his jealousy evaporated away and he cheerfully told Harry that, to allow time for getting dressed and having something to eat, Harry would probably have to get up at around four in the morning.

“And since you’re so bloody slow at waking up, better make that half past three,” continued Draco, gleefully.

“Yes, I suppose,” said Harry. “And since you’re my best friend, I’m sure you’ll get up too, so as to give me some support.”

“Ah, well, normally I would, but... you have to understand...” stammered Draco trying to think up a good excuse.

“Don’t worry about it. I was only joking. Even *Blaise* wouldn’t get up that early, and she’s the earliest riser I’ve ever met, or heard of. She actually seems to *like* getting up in the mornings. Crazy, I’m telling you,” said Harry smirking. “You really have to work on thinking up excuses though, a Hufflepuff could have done better.”

Laughing, Harry made his way to potions, followed by a grumbling Draco. They arrived early, which was a very good thing, in Harry’s opinion. Normally Snape wouldn’t have batted an eyelid if they turned up late, as Harry and Draco seemed to be his favourite students, but for the entire week he had been in a foul mood. He swept around the classroom glowering at everybody and took thirty points off Dean Thomas because he arrived three seconds after the bell. He took great pains in terrorising the Gryffindors, taking points off if they so much as blinked irregularly. Even Draco was subdued, and didn’t even try flicking dung beetles at Weasley or sabotage his potion. All the students were hard at work, and Snape had finally begun to calm down, when the inevitable happened. Neville’s cauldron exploded. Harry was willing to bet that the following tirade could be heard all the way at the top of the astronomy tower. After bellowing at Longbottom for a full ten minutes, reducing the poor boy to tears, Snape ordered him to sit next to Harry, making Draco move next to Granger. Opening his mouth to complain, Draco was quelled with a glare and

moved to his designated seat with no further protest. Neville fearfully gathered his things and moved towards Harry.

“Hopefully, you will not be so imbecilic as to blow up a cauldron when you are under the direction of Mr Potter, one of my best students. Come on boy, keep moving! Now, as I was saying, this is an immensely complex- Longbottom! Surely your brain cannot be so deficient as to make you unable to walk properly?” drawled Snape. This last was because of Longbottom nearly tripping himself up in his haste to do as the Potions master ordered. Reverting to his usual cold sarcasm, Snape continued teaching the lesson while Longbottom sat down, looking fearfully around him. The classroom was divided into two parts, Gryffindor and Slytherin. By sitting next to Harry, Neville had effectively isolated himself from any of his housemates and was surrounded by Slytherins. Longbottom was right to be worried, the looks on the Slytherin’s faces did not bode well for him. Luckily for him though, Harry was in quite a charitable mood, and had taken a liking to him. After the flying lesson Harry had often greeted him in the hallways, and actually found the boy quite amusing and likable, mainly because Ronald Weasley hated him which was in itself a glowing reference. And , after all, it was always good to have connections in other houses. Therefore, when Neville looked tentatively at him and opened his mouth and said,

“Sorry about all this Harry, I mean Potter. Um, yeah, I’ll try not to lower your mark, um...”

“Don’t worry about it, I’m a Slytherin, we always get good marks in potions. Just so long as you don’t blow up your cauldron too often, I’m okay. And call me Harry by the way,” Harry said, smiling and sticking his hand out to be shaken. Staring in shock Longbottom shook his hand and said,

“Err, thanks, um, call me Neville.”

The rest of the lesson they didn’t have a lot of time to talk as Snape was still on the warpath, but they managed to make a potion without melting, exploding, or otherwise harming themselves or their cauldron, which was probably a first for Neville.

After the lesson Harry was standing talking to Neville when Blaise ran up to him.

"What the hell are you doing Harry?" she demanded. "Do you have any idea what the other Slyths will say when they see you getting friendly with a Gryffindor? You're lucky no one saw you today, as everyone was busy working, but they'll notice sometime and then what will you do? Huh?"

"They'll just have to deal with it, as will you," said Harry glaring at her.

"Harry, I don't have a problem with it," sighed Blaise. "But then I had a much more neutral upbringing. All my family have been Ravenclaws for years. Just think what Draco will say. He hates Gryffindors."

"I know, but he'll just have to deal. It's not like I'm making friends with a muggleborn or something. Anyway, I'll make up some excuse. I'll just say I'm trying to gain his trust so as to turn him against his housemates, or something."

"What, lie to your best friend?" interrupted Neville. Up until then he'd remained silent, his head bowed in shame and embarrassment, but he seemed scandalised at the idea Harry put forward.

"What, is it too much for you're Gryffindor sensibilities? Come on, lighten up. I'm a Slytherin. Being devious and dishonest is what we do. But if it really bothers you I'll tell Draco the truth, but he's the only one. Okay?"

In the end, that's exactly what he did. As expected Draco did not take the news too well but managed to contain his displeasure to a bare minimum. He reluctantly agreed that "Longbottom wasn't as bad as most Gryffs" and probably wouldn't be as "cowardly and weak" as he was now, after he had been "trained up a bit". He also admitted that it would be a good way on keeping tabs on the Gryffindors. But he refused to "suck up to him" at all or "to act any differently" than he did now. Harry, who had expected a much worse outburst, was overjoyed at this and agreed readily.

"I suppose it won't be too bad. He is a pureblood after all. And it's always good to have some allies in other houses. Maybe there's hope left," drawled Draco.

"For him or for me?" asked Harry.

"For both of you. Now leave. You're supposed to be meeting Blaise in the library in two minutes."

With a yell, Harry raced off, taking care to bash into Weasley on the way. Draco merely gave a half-hearted glare at Longbottom, then turned to Thomas Nott and began discussing ways in which to achieve total world domination without anyone catching on to your plan.

Chapter 10 (hurray! I'm into double digits!)

On Saturday afternoon, while most students were outside relaxing, Harry was in his dormitory practising his karate. Harry reasoned that hardly any wizards were good at physical fighting. That meant that if he was disarmed in duel, he still had a chance of winning. It also helped to keep him fit. Therefore every couple of days he would practise, with Isis hissing 'helpful' comments at him.

No! No! All wrong. Try again. Ussselessss. You humansss are sso uncoordinated. she hissed, scornfully.

I'm trying my best here! What do you know anyway, snakes can't do Karate. replied Harry, a bit miffed that anyone should criticise him.

You forget I went to your lessssonss with you. replied Isis.

Before they could continue bickering Blaise walked into the room.

"Harry, I'm going to the third floor corridor and you're coming with me," stated Blaise.

"Blaise, you're not supposed to be in here, it's the boys dormitory. And the third floor is out of bounds, remember?" said Harry.

"Exactly, that's why I want to go. Ever since we came here it's been bugging me. I need to know what's behind it. Why we would "die a painful death" if we go near the place. It's intriguing."

"Let me get this straight, you want to go there *because* we could be killed?" asked Harry, bewildered by this logic.

"Aww, come on, please? I really, really want to go," pouted Blaise.

"Fine, but Draco has to come too," said Harry resignedly.

"Yay! Come on, we have to start planning!" yelled Blaise, jumping up and down hyperactively. "This is going to be so fun. It's not everyday you get to battle with an unknown danger. I feel so privileged."

Rolling his eyes Harry followed his friends down the stairs, Nemesis round his neck.

You know Harry? Sssometimes I quessstion your choicsse of friendss. I don't think they're completely sssane. remarked Isis.

Tell me about it. replied Harry, who had been thinking that himself.

This was how, three hours later, Harry came to be creeping along the third floor corridor, with Blaise and Draco beside him. They'd bribed Peeves with some new water balloons to make him create havoc in the opposite side of the castle. Therefore drawing away Filch, leaving the way relatively safe. A few tiptoed steps later, they found themselves outside the door leading to the corridor. Pulling out his wand, Harry performed the unlocking charm.

"Now, who wants to go in first?" he asked.

"Definitely not me," said Draco, hurriedly. "Since it was Blaise's idea, I think she should be the one."

"Why thanks Draco," replied Blaise, sincerely. She opened the door and strode in leaving the other two hanging around outside. "Come on you two, It's perfectly safe," she called.

Once they stepped inside, Harry's heart stopped beating.

"Um, Blaise, did I miss something or is there a sleeping giant three headed dog in the room?" he asked, in shock.

"Yeah that's right. Look, It's lying on a trap door. Help me lift him off it," said Blaise, unconcernedly walking towards it.

"Blaise, shouldn't we be walking away from a massive, man-eating dog?" said Draco. Harry suspected the only reason he hadn't run away yet, was that he was too petrified to move.

"Come on, it's asleep. And I doubt it's man-eating. Now help," said Blaise. Unfortunately, while she had been trying to lift the monster's paw off the trap door, it had begun to wake up. Blinking blearily around, it caught sight of the three Slytherins and leapt to its feet.

Growling fiercely, it bared its teeth, revealing giant fangs. All in all, it looked dangerous and bloodthirsty. As one, Harry and Draco grabbed hold of Blaise, who was staring at the monster in fascination, and pulled her out of the room, slamming the door behind them.

"Hey guys, what did you do that for, it was harmless!" protested Blaise as ferocious growls were heard from inside the room.

"It would have ripped us into shreds!" exclaimed Harry.

"Yeah, I for one want all by body pieces intact," seconded Draco, looking slightly green.

"Okay, fine, how about we come back when it's sleeping again," said Blaise, hopefully.

"Count me out," said Harry.

"Aww, you guys are such cowards. It's just a giant dog with three heads. What's so bad about that...Guys? Hey! Where are you going? Guys?"

Hearing her voice, the two boys doubled their pace as they sprinted back to their common room.

"Remind me to never, ever agree to any hair-brained scheme of hers again," panted Harry.

"Tell me about it," replied Draco. "Come on, let's go to dinner, that way she won't be able to drag us back. Honestly, what is Dumbledore thinking, keeping a thing like that at school."

"It must have been guarding something. And whatever it is, it's probably really valuable," said Harry.

"Well, I don't see anyway of finding out what it is," drawled Draco.

"I think I might already know," said Harry. "When I went to Gringotts with Professor Snape, he picked up something on Dumbledore's orders. It seemed really important and top secret. It was a small package, around the size of my fist."

“Oh yeah, that gives us a lot of new information. It’s secret, it’s important and Dumbledore knows about it. Sorry but that doesn’t really help. And even if we did know what it was, we couldn’t steal it, because there’s probably more than just that manic dog guarding it,” said Draco.

“Steal it?” asked Harry.

“Well, yeah, what else should we do with it. Remember the code of conduct, ‘If an opportunity for something you want presents itself...take it-duh.’ We wouldn’t be Slytherins if we didn’t steal occasionally.”

“I guess you’re right. I at least want to find out what it is, and the only way to do that is to actually find it. But I, for one, never want to go anywhere near that dog again, so we should try and look up maps of the castle and see if there’s any other way of getting down there,” said Harry.

“Go to the library? Are you crazy? No way am I ever going to willingly spend time in that place,” said Draco, firmly.

“But just think,” said Harry, softly in his most persuasive tone. “We would be getting the better of Dumbledore. We would get something that could give us power and fame, or, if it turns out not to be something we want, we could always sell it. I’m sure someone would want it, seeing as Dumbledore is set on protecting it. It’s a chance to show our true worth as Slytherins.”

“Okay fine. But only if you make Blaise do it too.”

“Deal, lets go find her,” said Harry with a satisfied smirk.

For the next week or so, the trio spent their time in the library, poring over maps of the castle. During that time they learnt a lot on how the school was built. It turned out that it wasn’t as random as people thought. The staircases all moved according to lunar cycles and positions of the stars and the other enchantments were all there for a reason. The three Slytherins found loads of secret passageways and hints of others. Because of this they began to explore the castle in search of more. They’d already found nine new passageways and

four hidden rooms. Harry had also discovered a passageway that could only be opened by parseltongue. This passageway branched off into dozens of corridors that lead all around the castle. One corridor lead deep underground to a training area, with a swimming pool, potions lab, library, fencing area and duelling arena. The three friends spent hours there, always finding new things to do. Draco spent most of the time in the pool, working on his tan, which was nonexistent (there was a spell on the room to make sunlight fill it, even during the winter) while Blaise alternated between the potions lab and the duelling arena. Harry spent most of his time in the library. All the books were written in parseltongue so the other two couldn't read them. Many were spell books, and Harry had learnt dozens of new spells already. According to the books, parseltongue spells were much more powerful than ordinary spells and none of them required a wand. They were also more exact. There weren't any general spells like a levitating charm. Instead there was a charm to levitate a book, another to levitate a table, and so on. This made it more complicated, but it was worth it. A parseltongue spell was almost impossible to block. It could be done, of course, but it required a lot of raw power, something most wizards didn't have. Harry began to use the spells when he practised duelling with Draco and Blaise. They'd quickly learnt to duck any parseltongue spell sent their way, as they just couldn't fight them.

After a long while of being distracted by the new things they'd found, Harry, Draco and Blaise finally got what they were searching for. They knew there were six rooms below the trap door. They had put together a map of the castle, adding in all the passages they knew about. They then saw that one of the parselmouth corridors led into the last of the six rooms. When they explored it, they found that the room was completely empty except for a mirror standing in the middle of the room. It was as high as the ceiling, with an ornate gold frame, standing on two clawed feet. The words "Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi" were inscribed around the top. The first time he'd looked into it, Harry had seen himself reflected back with at least ten other people standing around him. He had yelled in fright and spun round, drawing his wand. But there was no one there. Confused, he had turned back and had seen what he had not noticed before. All the people standing around him seemed familiar. They all looked similar,

sharing the same coloured eyes or hair or stature. It gradually dawned on him that these people must be his family.

"Mum? Dad?" he whispered.

"Oh move over!" said Draco, elbowing him aside. "You've been staring at yourself for at least 5 minutes. You're not that good looking, I on the hand..."

Harry glared at Draco, then stopped as he realised he wasn't paying any attention. Draco was staring into the mirror, a smirk on his face, looking amazingly pleased about something.

"Wow, this is so cool. I'm Minister of Magic, and I'm ordering Weasley around and he has to do as I say. I can insult Hufflepuffs and Gryffindors all day long and no one can do anything about it," said Draco. His voice sounded far away, as if he wasn't really there at all.

"Draco, stop. Lets just leave okay, there doesn't seem to be anything else here, and we can't possibly steal the mirror. Come on, lets go back and tell Blaise," said Harry, who was getting a bit freaked out. Draco, however, refused to budge, so Harry had to resort to dragging him away forcefully.

"Aww, come on, just five more minutes. I'd just started on the really good insults. Weasley was practically in tears. Let go of me."

"No way. We don't know anything about that mirror. We're going to go back and see if we can find anything about it in the library," stated Harry, firmly.

"Fine, ruin my fun why don't you," said Draco, pouting. They continued walking back to the common room, arguing all the way.

Chapter 11

“Dammit! This isn’t working!” growled Harry in frustration, slamming a book closed. He, Draco and Blaise were in the library looking for anything that could help them with the mirror. So far, they had found out that it showed your hearts deepest desire, but they had found nothing about the mirror being able to hide other objects. And all they knew about this supposed object was that it was small and valuable. Nothing else.

“You’re right,” said Blaise, sounding defeated. “We have to find a way to narrow down our search. Maybe if we asked one of the teachers?”

“All these books must have addled your brains,” said Draco, exasperated. “The teachers would never tell us anything. They didn’t even tell the prefects. What would make them tell us, we’re Slytherins for God’s sake, no one in their right minds would trust us with anything.”

“What you’re saying is true, but how about if we just spy on them? Nemesis understands English, all I have to do is ask her to sneak into the staff room and eavesdrop on the professors.”

“Brilliant! No more library for me!” said Draco, gleefully. “I still haven’t got used to you two speaking together, though. It’s freaky. I don’t like not knowing what’s going on. I’m positive that you talk about me all the time.”

“Relax, we don’t,” assured Harry. “I have better things to do with my time. Anyway we better hurry up if we don’t want to miss dinner.”

Walking towards the great hall listening to Draco and Blaise bickering Harry let his mind wander back to when his two friends first found out that he was a parselmouth. The three of them had been outside by the lake when Nemesis had slithered up. After chatting with her for a short while, Harry had noticed that the other two were staring at him, their expressions a mixture of shock, interest and fear. After the first exclamations of surprise, Draco and Blaise had calmed down and agreed not to tell anyone. Although they did berate Harry for ages for not telling them before. They had insisted on being properly introduced to Isis and been horrified to find out that she could

understand English. After assuring them that Isis had heard nothing embarrassing about them, they began to see the positive side of it. From Isis they gathered loads of blackmail material to use on the other members of their house (They were most shocked to find out that Marcus Flint slept with a pink, fluffy bunny rabbit called Twinkles under his pillow.) Since the only way to get anywhere in Slytherin was to have good 'connections' it was a very useful. They were definitely one up on all the other first years.

Perhaps it was because he was so busy, what with Quidditch practise five evenings a week, his homework, researching spells, the Mirror of Erised, duelling practise and pranking Weasley, but Harry could hardly believe that he had been at Hogwarts two whole months. The castle felt more like home than Privet Drive had ever done. His lessons, too, were becoming more and more interesting now that they had mastered the basics. (Of course, this did not count History, which Harry slept through.)

It was now Halloween and the trio were making their way down to the great hall for the feast. They were discussing the finer points of their newest prank that they were planning on doing that night. It involved Ronald Weasley, large polka dot boxers and dancing up and down the tables singing,

I love Slytherins,

They are so smart,

Their cunning, guile and handsomeness

Set the Slyths apart.

I'm a stupid Gryffindor,

My brash, reckless 'bravery'

Will get me killed some day.

Oh what wouldn't I give,

To be a Slyth,

Their ambition, drive and sexiness

Make them the best,

So unlike the rest,

Oh, I wish I were a Slyth.

Blaise and Harry thought up the lyrics. Draco tried to help, but his suggestions had to be abandoned, as it was impossible to rhyme some of the insults he thought up.

Sitting down in their seats they settled back for a very enjoyable evening. The older Slytherins had prepared a big party, which would probably go on all night, as Professor Snape never bothered stopping them. They had stolen food from the kitchens and somehow managed to procure large amounts of alcohol. From what the older students said, it seemed that they had parties whenever they could. At Halloween, at Christmas, pretty much any other holiday, after a Quidditch match, after a particularly embarrassing put down of the Gryffindors or Hufflepuffs, etc. etc. The celebrations always turned into orgies by the end with all students above fourteen ending up naked in bed with a splitting headache and very drunk student next to them. Needless to say, no one outside Slytherin had a clue what went on.

Harry was just readying himself to set off the prank when the doors of the Great Hall burst open and Professor Quirrell came sprinting into the hall, his turban askew and terror on his face. Everyone stared as he reached Professor Dumbledore's chair, slumped against the table and gasped, "Nundu- in the dungeons – thought you ought to know."

He then sank to the floor in a dead faint.

There was uproar. It took several purple firecrackers exploding from the end of Professor Dumbledore's wand to bring silence.

"Prefects," he rumbled, "Lead your Houses back to the dormitories immediately!"

“What?” yelled the Slytherins in shock and outrage while the prefects of the other houses began bustling about.

“Our dormitory is in the dungeons,” yelled Flint. “Where the fucking Nundu is! You can’t possibly expect us to go-”

“That is enough,” replied Dumbledore sternly. “You will all do as I say or you will be expelled!”

With angry muttering the Slytherins did as he said and followed their prefects out of the Hall. As soon as they were out of sight and hearing Flint turned round on them.

“Right you lot. We’ve got to take this seriously. We’ve got stay alert! That bloody fool in there is obviously trying to get us killed. I for one prefer expulsion to death, as, I hope, do most of you. What we should do is go up to the top of the castle, away from the dungeons, and therefore away from certain death. Everyone okay with that?”

“I don’t know. After all, surely it can’t be that dangerous. What would Dumbledore gain from our deaths? It would be very bad publicity and he could get into a lot of trouble. I don’t want to get expelled,” said a second year, dubiously.

“Do you know anything about Nundus? They are massive, bloodthirsty creatures with toxic breath that can kill all and it takes dozens of wizards to subdue them! It will destroy us!” yelled Flint, getting more and more worked up.

“I agree with Flint,” said Harry. “The board of governors is made up of entirely Slytherins. They’d never let us all be expelled. Let’s just leave.”

Taking the murmured agreement that followed this as a yes, Flint led them at a sprint up the stairs. Turning a corner they ran into Snape.

“I didn’t see you. I didn’t hear you. I don’t have any idea of what you’re doing,” said Snape, calmly. “Good thinking by the way.”

With that he swept off, leaving a smirking Flint behind him.

"Snape's heading for the third floor," whispered Blaise. "Why?"

"Who bloody cares, I'm more concerned with staying alive," replied Draco, as they ran up yet another flight of stairs. As they reached the top a terrifying sight met their eyes. The Nundu was right before them, and was grinning from ear to ear, seeing it's dinner arrive so quickly. It's huge body, covered with purple fur, and black spots scared the Slytherins senseless.

"Retreat! Back!" yelled Flint, as he ran from the beast, followed quickly by most of the students.

Just as Harry turned round to do the sensible thing and follow them, he saw out of the corner of his eye a door opening and, to his horror, a bushy haired Gryffindor stepped out, crying and wiping her eyes.

"Come on Harry! Forget the girl! Run!" shouted Draco in desperation.

Turning back to the Nundu, Harry saw that he had already waited too long. It would unleash its toxic breath soon. If it did so they would all be killed. Before the Nundu could react, Harry jumped right in front of it. Realising what Harry was planning on doing, Draco and Blaise pulled out their wands yelling "Stupefy" just as Harry shouted *Ssachesssssa* shooting a parseltongue stunning spell right between its eyes. The three spells hit the creature at exactly the same time and place, right between the eyes. The nundu teetered and stumbled backwards, eventually dropping to the floor, unconscious.

Harry stood there, staring at the creature in shock, adrenalin running through his veins. He knew parseltongue spells were powerful, but that powerful? Sure, the other two had helped, and both of them were powerful magicians, but even so three eleven year olds should never be able to do what would be impossible for dozens of full-grown wizards. In a daze, he registered Blaise and Draco coming up behind him. The other Slytherins had all disappeared; probably back to their dormitories.

"Wow," whispered Blaise in awe. A sudden slamming and loud footsteps made them look up. They hadn't realised how much noise they must have been making. The sound of a hundred students panicking travelled far. A moment later, Professor Dumbledore came

rushing up the stairs, closely followed by Snape and McGonnagal, with Quirrell bringing up the rear. Quirrell took one look at the fallen Nundu, let out a faint whimper and collapsed to the floor, clutching his heart. Snape bent over the Nundu, while McGonnagal glared at the Slytherins in fury. But before she could speak, Dumbledore said gravely, in what he obviously hoped was a fatherly tone of voice,

“Harry, I suppose you did this?”

“Yes,” stated Harry, guardedly, refusing to give anything away.

“What were you thinking?!” shrieked McGonnagal. “You’re lucky you weren’t killed. Why aren’t you in your dormitory?”

Snape gave Harry a swift, piercing look and nodded his head in a barely visible gesture of assent. His sign that he would back Harry up in any lie he told.

“Well, sir,” said Harry, his brain racing. “I happened to see-” here he strained to remember the bushy-haired girl’s name. “Um, Granger running upstairs in the wrong direction. She knew about the Nundu, but since she’s a muggleborn she might not know how dangerous they are, so the three of us came to warn her, as no teacher was available at the time.”

Seeing Granger open her mouth to disagree to this, all four Slytherins, including Snape, glared at her in threat. Obviously realising that they would give her hell if she told, she closed her mouth with a snap.

“So you considered it your civic duty did you?” asked McGonnagal, disbelievingly.

“Well, frankly yes,” said Draco smoothly. “As there was no sign of any Gryffindors rushing to save her.”

“Really Minerva,” interjected Snape, languidly. “You cannot give out to them for rescuing a fellow student out of the goodness of their hearts.”

“Be that as it may, none of this answers the question as to how you managed to overcome the Nundu in the first place. It is a remarkable

feat,” said Dumbledore, staring searchingly at Harry, who felt a presence in his mind, as if the headmaster was trying to read his very soul. Guessing that Dumbledore was using legilemency, and knowing that it required eye contact, Harry wrenched his gaze from Dumbledore’s and instead focused on a blank spot on the opposite wall.

“It was just fluke, sir. It must have been quite old and tired.” This was partly true, the Nundu did not seem to be as powerful as he had read they were.

“Hmm,” said Dumbledore, frowning. Harry grinned to himself. He knew that the headmaster realised that there was more to it than that, but he couldn’t use legilemency to find out. If the Slytherins didn’t want to tell, they wouldn’t. Dumbledore couldn’t even punish them for not going straight to their dormitories, as they had supposedly disobeyed so as to save a fellow student’s life. Even though Dumbledore probably knew they were lying (after all, Harry had to give the man some credit) he couldn’t prove it. All in all, a very good state of affairs, thought Harry, smugly.

“Very well,” said Dumbledore, finally. “I will leave you to your head of house to deal with.” With that he swept off looking amazingly put out at being outsmarted by a bunch of eleven-year-olds.

“Well, Miss Granger, you foolish girl, what were you thinking, behaving in such a fashion!” said McGonagall, obviously trying to reassert her authority.

“But Professor I-” protested the girl, amazed at the unfairness of it all.

“But nothing, Miss Granger. I am most disappointed in you. Five points from Gryffindor. Come along now, back to your dormitory immediately!” replied the Professor, nostrils flaring in anger as she ushered the girl away towards Gryffindor house. Quirrell followed soon after, looking extremely shaken. As soon as they were alone, Professor Snape said,

“I must profess myself intrigued. I would very much like to know how you managed to stun such a creature, but I realise the three of you will not confide in me therefore I will satisfy myself by telling you how

proud I am of the three of you. Managing to outwit the Headmaster is impressive, and getting a Gryffindor in trouble while doing so is a plus. Not many could have done it. Ten points to each of you. I would advise you though, to keep a low profile the next couple of weeks. It would also be wise to learn occulemency. Dumbledore will stop at nothing to get you expelled. He views you, Harry, as a threat. You are powerful. In fact you will probably rival him in power once you leave school. And that is something that he wishes to avoid at all costs. Either he will try to manipulate you to his own cause, or else he will get rid of you. Luckily, since you are famous, it will be difficult for him to manage it, at least for the time being.

“Anyway, enough of this. You should go down to the common room. I’m sure tales of your adventure will only add to the festivities. Although I have a feeling your housemates are already acquainted with what happened here, as I saw Ms Parks sneak down the stairs a couple of minutes ago, no doubt to ready Slytherin for your arrival.”

Muttering their thanks, the three of them turned to leave when Snape called Harry back.

“I just want to tell you that your mother would be very proud of you right now. She herself excelled in creating hell for the Gryffindors. It seems you have inherited her talent. She was indeed a great witch,” said Snape, his dark eyes staring into Harry’s with an intense expression of pride and something else Harry couldn’t quite identify. Regret?

“Thank you, Professor,” said Harry, bowing slightly. Turning he hurried to catch up with Blaise and Draco. All three of them were silent as they walked, their minds on the events of the day, until Blaise said,

“This sucks. We missed out on that brilliant prank on Weasley.”

“Don’t worry, we can do it another time. And this way we get more time to perfect it. Maybe think up some better rhymes for the song,” drawled Draco, who seemed to have recovered his customary coolness. He’d lost it for a while when confronted with the Nundu. When Harry remarked on this, Draco glared but his reply was cut off as they entered the common room and were assaulted by noise.

Music was blaring at them from all sides and the room was overflowing with people who were either looking incredibly tipsy, making out on the dance floor, or both. As soon as the Slyths caught sight of them, a huge cheer went up.

“Brilliant! Wonderful! Truly worthy of a Slytherin,” shouted a seventh year over the din, cocktail glass in hand.

“Yeah,” drawled Lucretia Parks. “I didn’t have time to run away, um, I mean, uh, strategically retreat, so I hid and saw the whole thing. It was awesome! This shows that bloody headmaster what happens when he messes with Slytherins! You guys want a drink?” she asked, gesturing to a table covered in bottles of at least fifty different types of alcohol.

“Hell yeah!” said Draco in delight, running over and pouring himself some tequila. Grinning, Harry turned to Blaise and gestured to the dancing couples.

“Want to dance?” he asked.

“Sure!” replied Blaise and dragged him, laughing, over to the dance floor.

Chapter 12

"Harry! Harry! Wake up god dammit!"

"Uh? Go away," mumbled Harry sleepily and turned over. Next second his covers were pulled back and he was drenched in water.

"Shit! What the hell is going on?" he asked angrily, sitting bolt upright and looking into the smirking face of Blaise.

"Well, your darling pet snake woke me up and seemed to want to be brought to you so, that's what I did, only I couldn't get you to wake up."

"So you threw water all over me?" asked Harry, irritated.

Who caresss about that. It's not like it'sss that late. It'sss eleven o'clock, hissed Isis, slithering off Blaise's arm and onto the bed. **It wasss the only way to wake you up. I tried hissssssing in your ear, but you wouldn't budge, then I tried waking Draco, but he jussst groaned and muttered ssssomething about drinking to much alcohol. Blaisse wasss the only one who wassss at all resspsssive. She was the only Slytherin up in fact. Everyone seems exhausted after the party.**

Eleven o'clock! That's way to early. It's a saturday today. Whatever made you decide to drench me to the skin had better be worth it. grumbled Harry.

It isss. Lassst night, while you were carousssssing in the common room to all hourss, I wasssss working. I sssnuck into the ssssstaff room and I heard ssssome very interessssssting thingss. The thing that you've been sssssearching for, the valuable, powerful, mysssstical, wonderful, brilliant, sssssssecret...

Yeah, yeah, get on with it. interrupted Harry, impatiently.

Fine then, hissed Isis, grumpily. **ruin my big moment why don't you. The thing issss the philosssssopherssss sssstone. There, happy?**

Wow, whispered Harry in awe. **Are you sure?**

“What? What’s happened? What are you saying?” asked Blaise.

Coursssse I’m sure, hissed Isis indignantly, ignoring the girl. **I heard Snape and McGonnagal disssscussssssing it. It’sss guarded by sssseven enchantmentssss from different teacherssss. Professssor Sssprout, Flitwick, McGonnagal, Quirrell, Ssssnape, Dumbledore and Hagrid. That’ssss who the three-headed dog belonged to. Apparently, it’sss name isss fluffy.**

Fluffy! exclaimed Harry. **Is it just me or is absolutely everyone in this school crazy? Who in their right minds would call a bloodthirsty monster like that Fluffy. I mean come on.**

“Hey, quit talking snake-talk,” demanded Blaise. “I want to know what’s going on.”

“The thing that the dog is guarding is the philosopher’s stone,” said Harry, waiting for a gasp of recognition, which never came.

“Who’s stone? Why do you care about a rock?”

“This isn’t just a rock, Blaise,” said Harry, shocked and reproofing. “It can change anything into pure gold and make elixir of life. Surely every Slytherin should know about it. Long life and as much money as you want! Just think of it!”

“Oh, you mean the Sorcerer’s Stone. Sure I’ve heard of it, I do have some basic knowledge you know. I pick up a book once in a while.”

“Okay, sorry, I forgot it had two different names. Anyway, we have to figure out a way to steal it!”

“I think we should leave that to Draco. Out of the three of us, he’s the one with the most experience at thinking up cunning and devious ways to get what he wants. Remember how he talked that third year Gryffindor into giving him fifty-six sickles in exchange for a galleon.”

“Yeah, that was funny. Alright, lets go ask Draco, but first we have to wake him up.”

Once Draco had been coaxed from his bed, Blaise told him what they had found out. Needless to say, Draco was delighted at this unexpected turn of events. At first Harry thought he had gone into shock, but he soon realised that Draco was already thinking out ways to get his hands on such a treasure. Harry could practically see the wheels turning in his head.

“Okay, here’s what we do,” said Draco, decidedly. “We can’t possibly steal the stone with Dumbledore in the castle. He probably has some wards up that will alert him the moment the stone disappears and we wouldn’t have time to get away. We’ll have to wait for the opportune moment, when Dumbledore is not in the castle. Meanwhile, we can try to work out how to get the stone out of the mirror. I think it’s the enchantment Dumbledore thought up, so knowing him it’ll be something incredibly simple. So simple that it is impossible to work out.”

“Does that make sense?” asked Harry.

“Shut up. This is very serious. If we manage to pull this off we will become millionaires. Don’t you realise that? This is not something to be taken lightly,” said Draco, his voice rising.

“Yeah, yeah. Stop getting so worked up. We won’t be able to use the thing straight away anyway. Dumbledore will keep a sharp eye on the wizarding world for quite some time after it’s stolen, hoping to find out who the thieves were. If we suddenly start throwing money around I think he’d notice something,” said Blaise.

“You’re forgetting one thing. We all throw money about already. Draco especially,” pointed out Harry.

“You see, it’s fool proof,” said Draco, smirking in satisfaction.

“I’m not too sure,” said Blaise. “There seems to be someone after the stone already. The break in at Gringotts, the extra protection by bringing it here to Hogwarts, it all points to another thief. Probably a wannabe Dark Lord out for a bit of power. Actually, now that I think about it, the Nundu was also probably distraction caused by whoever’s after the stone so their way would be clear. Obviously it didn’t work, though.”

“Yeah, you’re right. The only way for a Nundu to get into the castle would be if someone let it in. There are thousands of wards around the building preventing dangerous beasts from entering,” agreed Harry. “I have to say I’m not surprised. The philosopher’s stone would probably attract millions of dark wizards out for a bit of power.”

“Of course. Material wealth may not be the most important thing in the world but it’s high up on the list. Just under immortality and world domination. So it is imperative that we get that stone. All my plans would be helped immensely if I was immortal and had unlimited amounts of money,” said Draco, determinedly.

“Draco, please tell me you aren’t planning on how to rule the world *already*? We’re only eleven years old,” said Harry.

“And what if I am? Just think of having the whole world at your feet. You can’t say the idea isn’t appealing.”

“Just so long as you remember that life is always 100 fatal. If we get the stone, we’ll probably live longer than most but someone will probably steal it from us at some point, just like we’re doing now. We wouldn’t be able to hide and guard it for ever,” said Blaise.

“It’ll be enough to help us fight our way to the top and stay there. I then propose to find another method of immortality. As a back up you could say.”

“Fight *our* way? Since when have I agreed to take over the world? Anyway, if you want to rule the universe, best to try the inconspicuous approach. That’s one rule Voldemort sure should have listened to,” said Harry, contemplatively.

“Well, we have plenty of time to think up a strategy. Though I always think it’s best to be prepared. Anyway, let’s go. Remember, Knightly and Blake are duelling each other in half an hour. They’re the best duellers in the whole school. We need to get good seats. We also have to have time to place our bets. I’m counting on winning a lot of money on this.”

“You’re forgetting, I have to go down to the Quidditch pitch. Quite lucky you woke me up in fact. Flint is a slave driver. Since the match

is coming up soon he wants all of us to practise every hour of every day. He let us sleep in a bit today, but only because he knew he would have an awful hang over from the party last night."

"I never thought I would say this, but it would probably be better for you if you had been on the Gryffindor team. I doubt you would have to practise as much," said Blaise.

"Arg! Slander! Treason! How dare you even think that anything those idiots do is better than the Slytherin way," cried Draco, dramatically, clutching his heart. Then stopped as two small round-faced boys appeared. "Ah, what have we here? Hufflepuffs!"

"Well I have to get going then," said Harry, regretfully, not wanting to miss Draco and Blaise tormenting some hufflepuffs. "See you!"

As he turned the corner he saw Blaise draw her wand and put the leg-locking spell on the two unfortunates, a malicious smirk on her face.

Chapter 13

Harry made his way down to the Quidditch pitch, grumbling under his breath. The first Quidditch match was coming up soon and the team was training harder, longer and in all conditions. Harry hadn't been properly dry for weeks and was beginning to curse the day he went after Neville. Flint, the captain, was a complete fanatic. After being yelled at for coming late (even though he was at least five minutes early), Harry was made to look for the Snitch with two beaters, Montague and Bole, hitting bludgers towards him as hard as they possibly could. Harry had already been hit dozens of times and was aching all over. Harry had to admit though that Flint's insane plan was at least partly working. Harry, even though he was not ducking instinctively, was at least becoming immune to the knocks as his body was so bruised it couldn't possibly get any worse. The beater's aims were amazingly accurate. Every time they managed to hit bludgers straight at Harry and at the same time hit him over the head with their bats while making it appear to be an accident.

Just when he felt that he would drop from his broom in exhaustion, Harry spotted the snitch and plummeted downwards. He pulled out of his dive inches from the ground with the snitch clasped firmly in his hand. Unfortunately, this was not good enough for Flint.

"That took you thirteen minutes! Way to long. You get it down to five or else you're of the team. Absolutely useless! And you two worthless idiots," he spat, turning on the beaters. "How could you let him catch it? Your aim is miserable, I want at least five Gryffindors in the hospital wing on the match on Friday. Gang up on them and hit them as hard as you can. Knock them off their brooms. I don't care if they've got the Quaffle or not. I don't care if they're not in scoring distance. I don't give a damn about the rules. Like any self respecting Slytherin I'm planning to cheat. We have won for the past seven years now and every time we've never had less than eight fouls. Hopefully, praise Salazar, this year we'll break the record of sixteen. Now that would be an achievement to be proud of. Even better, of course, would be to cheat and get away with it, but Hooch is too good, she sees everything. Even so, I insist on steamrolling Gryffindor."

“Calm down Marcus,” said Adrian Pucey to Flint, who was hyperventilating. “There’s no way we won’t win. We Slytherins are experts on getting what we want. We were busy nicking the silverware when the Gryffs were sucking their thumbs and crying for mummy. We are masters at cheating, lying, blackmail. Anything remotely illegal. The Gryffindorks don’t stand a chance.”

“Maybe, but we should stay on our guard nonetheless. Even the best-laid plans go astray. I know nothing of the new Gryffindor Seeker. None of my spies managed to get me any information.”

“Probably cause they don’t have one,” said Bletchley complacently.

“The Gryffindors would never forfeit a game. They must have one. I want everyone to keep a look out. For today practise is over, so leave and keep alert for any rumours circulating the school.”

Wincing in pain, Harry made his way down to the dorms, promising himself that he would give up Quidditch as soon as he possibly could. If he wanted to get hit repeatedly he would have stayed in Little Whinging with Dudley. Although Harry had to admit it was better to be on the Slytherin team than any other. Not only were you guaranteed to win, but you also didn’t have the extra hazard of being of being hexed in the corridors. In the week leading up to the match the Gryffindor team was never seen without a large group of friends acting as bodyguards. This didn’t stop the Slytherins from cursing them though. Fred Weasley had been hospitalised twice so far and Katie Bell had a sight disorder charm placed on her and kept bumping into walls.

Harry had visited Fred in the hospital to make sure there were no hard feelings. When he arrived (and managed to sneak past Madam Pomfrey who wouldn’t let any Slytherins near Fred) he found both twins plotting on how to retaliate. Never one to miss an opportunity, Harry tried to eavesdrop but they caught sight of him before he could hear anything important. After assuring the twins that this was the case and that he hadn’t had anything to do with Fred’s ‘accident’, the twins welcomed Harry with open arms and proceeded to babble on about all the pranks they had played over the

years. After regaling Harry with stories of McGonnagal staggering around the Great Hall singing about Goblins and doing a strip tease on the table (She was drunk out of her mind after having vodka slipped into her drink) they began talking about the up coming match.

Although Harry and the twins continued to be friends, the relationship between their two houses was at its worst. The Gryffindors, though not hopeful about the outcome of the match, were trying to put up a brave front, backed by most of Hufflepuff and some of Ravenclaw. Fights broke out regularly. The Slytherins provoked the Gryffs 24-7 and, as usual, they only had to say a couple of well thought out words for the Gryffs to lose their tempers and launch out in a physical attack.

Not only the tensions between students but also teachers were high. McGonnagal was stressed out trying to prevent the fighting while Snape was enjoying himself immensely, dishing out insults left, right and centre or, when he was feeling particularly vindictive, using the subtle art of sarcasm to terrify or infuriate everyone around him. Professor Sprout, an ex-hufflepuff, ran at the mere sight of him. The students, too, were walking in fear, while the Slytherins were spurred onto new heights by his excellent example. All the Slytherins looked up to Snape. He was very powerful and his insults were works of art. He could threaten, connive, manipulate, blackmail or bribe his way into or out of any situation. For the Slytherins, his lessons not only taught them potions, but also the skills of intimidation. Especially sarcasm, which was Snape's favourite method of verbal torture.

The day of the match dawned very bright and cold. All the Slytherins were in excellent moods and wishing Harry good luck and recommending different ways of cheating. Terence Higgs, the main seeker, had 'accidentally' lost his broom, thrown up and, on his way to the hospital wing, fallen down the stairs and broken his leg. Wanting to remain alive and intact and knowing when to cut his losses, he had admitted defeat and had passed on his position to Harry, who, while thrilled, was also extremely nervous. Draco was not helping. After assuring him that the most serious accidents always happened to the seekers, Draco kindly informed Harry that, seeing as he was a beginner, there was a bet going that he wouldn't last more than half an hour. Blaise, meanwhile, was trying to force feed him.

“You’ve got to eat some breakfast!”

“I don’t want anything,” said Harry sulkily.

“Just a bit of toast,” wheedled Blaise, waving the bread in his face.

“You need to keep up your strength Harry,” drawled Draco. “If we lose every single Slytherin will be out for your blood.”

“Well, if you put it like that,” said Harry paling and started to shove cereal down his throat.

“See, I can always get him to do what I want,” said Draco, smugly. Blaise glared and stuck her tongue out at him.

“Honestly, you’re so immature,” drawled Draco, with a long-suffering sigh. Blaise just hexed him and got on with her meal.

By eleven o’clock the whole school seemed to be out by the stands around the Quidditch pitch. In the changing rooms, Harry and the rest of the team were pulling on their green and black robes. Flint cleared his throat for silence.

“Ok, I don’t know how to get this through your thick heads but I’ll try to make it clear for you. This is the best team we’ve had for years so if we don’t win I will hunt you down and skin you alive. Literally. Right, let’s move it people. Montague, Bole, you had better get at least two Gryffindors out of the game. Chasers, get the Quaffle or I will kill you. Potter?” threats seemed to fail him. “Just catch the fucking snitch.”

Shaking with nerves, Harry followed the rest of the team out onto the Quidditch pitch to loud cheers from their housemates. Madame Hooch was refereeing. She stood in the middle of the pitch waiting for the two teams, her broom in her hand.

“Now I want a nice clean game, all of you,” she said once they were all gathered around her. Harry didn’t know why she bothered saying anything. She must have realised by now, after so many years in the school, that Slytherin would never fight fair. The teams just

glared at each other, sizing up the opposition. The mysterious Gryffindor Seeker turned out to be a fourth year Harry vaguely recognised as Edward or Edmund Beech. He had never struck Harry as a Quidditch enthusiast. In fact, he looked like the kind of boy that was useless at any sport. He seemed absolutely terrified, as if he would turn and run at any moment.

“On my whistle, three, two, one,” Hooch gave a loud blast on her silver whistle. Fifteen brooms rose up, high into the air. They were off.

“And the Quaffle is immediately taken by Adrian Pucey of Slytherin,” the Weasley twin’s friend, Lee Jordan, was doing the commentating, closely watched by Professor McGonnagal. “And he’s really belting along up there, nice dive around Katie Bell, off up the field and-OUCH, that must of hurt, hit on the back of the head by a bludger-sent his way by Fred Weasley-nice play by Gryffindor beater-and Johnson in possession, speeding towards the goal posts-shoots-Fuck! she misses.”

“Jordan!”

“Sorry Professor, it just slipped out,”

Way up above the rest of the players, Harry was gliding over the game, squinting about for some sign of the snitch. He was following Flint’s game plan that was basically “Keep out of the way unless you want the other team to beat you to a pulp. The first thing they’ll try to do is take you out.” Staring around for the snitch, Harry didn’t have much to do. For a while he amused himself by listening to the commentary but that tended to be nothing but insults directed towards the Slytherin players. The team was beginning to play dirty. Alicia Spinnet was in the hospital wing and George Weasley was sporting a broken nose and a rather dazed expression. The score was 50-20 to Slytherin. They definitely seemed to be in control of the game. Feeling very smug Harry sent a threatening glare at the other Seeker who cowered away from it. *So much for Gryffindor bravery* thought Harry. *How pathetic.* Just as he dodged a bludger his broom gave a frightening lurch. For a split second he thought he was going to fall and gripped the handle tightly with both hands. It happened

again. It was as if the broom was trying to buck him off, but Nimbus Two Thousands just didn't do that. Harry tried to turn back to the goal posts; he had half a mind to ask Flint to call time out- and then he realised his broom was completely out of his control. He couldn't turn it; he couldn't direct it at all. It was zigzagging through the air making violent swishing movements which almost unseated him.

Lee was still commentating. "Slytherin in possession, unfortunately. Flint passes Spinnet-passes Bell- ready to shoot and-YES! Hit hard in the face by a bludger, hope it broke his nose. Go Gryffindor! Our beaters have some aim huh? Oh damn, Pucey scores, 70-30 to Slytherin. Lousy scum,"

The Slytherins were cheering, taking no notice of Lee's commentating or Harry's broom that was carrying him slowly higher, away from the game and towards the dark and threatening edges of the forbidden forest.

Suddenly, people were pointing up at Harry all over the stands. His broom started to roll over and over with him just managing to hang on. Then the whole crowd gasped. Harry's broom had given a wild jerk and thrown Harry off. He was now dangling from it, holding on with only one hand. The Gryffindors were all staring in shock. Fred and George flew up and started circling Harry, obviously trying to catch him if he fell. Never one to miss an opportunity, Marcus Flint seized the Quaffle and scored ten times without anyone realising. The other Slytherins, realising that it took dark magic to tamper with a broom and that someone had been jinxing it, began searching the crowd for the culprit. Montague, seeing both Snape and Quirrel staring at Harry and muttering under their breaths, hit a bludger at Quirrel, while blocking Snape's line of sight with his broom.

Up in the air, Harry was suddenly able to clamber back onto his broom. As he was speeding to the ground he saw a faint glitter in front of him and, sticking out his arm, felt the snitch fall into his hand. Landing on the pitch on all fours he raised his hand and shouted,

"I've caught it! Slytherin win!"

The match ended in total confusion. Professor McGonnagal was seen leaving the pitch in tears while Lee Jordan grudgingly called out the

results. Slytherin won, 220 points to 40. The Gryffindors were all convinced that it had been an act, and that Harry hadn't actually been in danger of falling off at all. The Slyths were of mixed minds but didn't give a damn about anything except the fact that they won. The Slytherin team though, knew that it was real. As they hurried Harry to the changing rooms Montague quickly told him his suspicions.

"It was either Snape or Quirrel who did it, or both. Though personally I think Snape is the only one with enough power to curse a Nimbus Two Thousand."

"Why the hell would Snape try and kill his own Seeker. He wants Slytherin to win just as much as the rest of us," said Bletchley. "He is also too subtle to kill him off so messily and in public like that. He was probably saying the counter curse. He has no reason to want Potter dead."

"Oh, he has a reason alright," said Flint darkly. "Though I doubt he'd try something so risky, especially under Dumbledore's nose,"

"Why, what reason does he have?" asked Harry bewildered. No one answered him. Just muttered something under their breaths and sidled off as Blaise and Draco came into view.

"Oh my god, are you alright?" asked Blaise worriedly.

"I'm fine, but just listen to this," replied Harry and proceeded to tell them all that the other members had said.

"They're right you know. Snape does have a reason to kill you," said Draco. "I'm almost certain that Snape is a deatheater, though no one is sure if he was loyal or not."

"You mean he served Voldemort? How do you know this?"

"There's a reason why everyone says us Malfoy's are dark wizards," said Draco bitterly and refused to say anymore. Instead he changed the subject to the party the Slytherins were preparing in celebration of their victory. Realising he'd get nothing more out of him, Harry half heartedly joined in while his brain tried to make sense of all

he had heard. He didn't believe that Snape was the one who had tried to kill him. He'd always seemed to like Harry and always favoured him in class. Harry was also convinced that Snape would have dozens of ways to get rid of him without being so obvious. And Dumbledore would hardly hire a loyal Deatheater, at least Harry hoped not. One thing was definite though. Someone was out to get him and it would be best if he was prepared. Walking up to the castle with his friends he promised himself that he would read up on curses and find someone to teach him Occlumency. After all, it might come in handy.

Chapter 14

Christmas was coming. One morning in mid-December, Hogwarts woke to find itself covered in several feet of snow. The lake froze solid and the Weasley twins were punished for bewitching several snow balls so that they followed Quirrell around, bouncing off the back of his turban. The few owls that managed to battle their way through the stormy sky to deliver post had to be nursed back to health by Hagrid before they could fly off again.

No one could wait for the holidays to start. While the Slytherin common room had roaring fires and heating charms placed on it, the draughty corridors had become icy and bitter winds rattled the windows in the classrooms. Snape's dungeon was freezing, making the students huddle together for warmth, but deep down, in the depths of the castle, where none of the other houses dared to go, was warm and cosy. The Slytherins had long ago decided that their common room wasn't big enough and the library wasn't private enough, so they had taken over the lower part of the school. While the common room was always loud, with people chatting and the latest hits blaring out from the loud speakers, in the depths of the dungeons was deadly silence. This was where Slytherins went to work on their less...desirable- projects that they wanted to keep secret. It was where strategies were thought out, plans formed and revenge plotted. It was also where Harry was having his Occlumency lessons.

Some careful questions had led him to a 6th year girl called Daisy Thornbell who had agreed to tutor him in return for some deadly venom coaxed out of Nemesis. Daisy Thornbell was born of two old-fashioned, peace loving Hufflepuffs who expected her in turn to grow up to be a kind, caring and respectable girl, hence the name. Unfortunately for them, Daisy had been sorted into Slytherin where she quickly became known for her outstanding duelling and brilliant blackmailing skills. Anyone who mocked her soon found themselves running in terror at the mere mention of her name. Being locked in a room with a grinning Daisy with a bloodthirsty glint in her eye was something everyone wanted to steer clear of. Even the punishment for wasting her time was something to be avoided at all costs, so it was with some reluctance that Harry approached her. Nevertheless,

she agreed to teach Harry with Draco and Blaise thrown in for free as a thank you for Slytherins victory in Quidditch.

She was a good, if impatient, teacher and the trio soon found themselves blocking their minds automatically whenever they made eye contact with anyone. They weren't good enough to hold off a mental attack for very long, but they knew enough to give themselves enough time to think of something else. (cursing the attacker into next week was something that sprung to mind) Harry did suspect though, that Daisy only agreed to teach them so as to be able to read their minds and memories. After all, extra information on Harry Potter and the Malfoy heir never hurt anyone.

Meanwhile, Ronald Weasley was being as annoying as ever. The trio had finally played the prank that they had planned to do at Halloween and, as expected, dear Ronniekins was furious. Determined to get his own back he lay in wait for Harry and bombarded him with insults, mainly centring on Harry having no proper family and being a "no good, traitorous snake." Whenever he did this Harry pointed out that the "no-good" snakes had still managed to beat the "oh so wonderful" Gryffindors at Quidditch for the 8th year in a row. A fact which Weasley always seemed to conveniently forget.

Harry wasn't going back to Privet Drive for Christmas. Professor McGonnagal had come round the week before, making a list of students who would be staying for the holidays, and Harry had signed up at once. Blaise was also staying, but Draco was leaving, although he wasn't very enthusiastic about it. According to him, every single relation, no matter how distantly connected, was descending down on Malfoy Manor for the entire holiday.

"It will be an absolute nightmare. I'll never have a moments peace," complained Draco as they left the dungeons at the end of potions. "It won't feel like Christmas at all. It will just be two long weeks of family politics."

"Well, at least you won't have to put up with Weasley," said Blaise comfortingly.

"And we'll be spending our time looking for more info on the Mirror of Erised," said Harry.

None of them had given up on their quest to steal the Philosophers Stone. However, they were no closer to discovering how to get it. Harry had been wondering for a while if the answer wasn't in the restricted section of the library. Unfortunately, you needed a specially signed note from one of the teachers and he knew he'd never get one. Those were the books containing powerful dark magic never taught at Hogwarts. Only older students studying advanced Defence Against the Dark Arts read them.

"Keep looking while I'm away, won't you?" said Draco. "Send me an owl if you find anything."

"Will do," replied Harry.

Once the holidays were started, Blaise and Harry were having to good a time to think much about the mirror. They had the dormitories to themselves and the common room was far emptier than usual so they were able to get good armchairs by the fire. They spent their time plotting ways of getting Weasley expelled and messing around in the secret passageways they had found.

On Christmas Eve, Harry went to bed looking forward to the next day. Blaise had insisted on sleeping in Draco's bed instead of her dormitory and they stayed up talking for hours. When Harry woke early the next morning, the first thing he saw was the small pile of packages at the foot of his bed.

"Merry Christmas!" yelled Blaise as they both scrambled out of bed and rushed towards the presents, ignoring Isis's grumbling about inconsiderate humans ruining her beauty sleep. Picking up the top parcel, Harry tore it open to find a thick, hand-knitted sweater in emerald green and a large box of home made fudge. Inside was a note which said,

"Merry Christmas, dear. Fred and George have told me so much about you and, seeing as you don't have any family of your own to send you presents, I thought you might like these.

Love, Mrs Weasley."

“Oh my god, I got a present from Fred and George’s mum! They might have talked about me but I’m sure Ronald did to. I wonder why she did it?”

“Well, I think it’s quite nice of her,” said Blaise. “If a little strange. Just don’t tell Draco or he’ll have a fit. Oh, thanks so much for your present. It’s wonderful.”

“Welcome,” said Harry. He had given her chocolate frogs and a book called ‘Misunderstood Monsters’. In light of Fluffy, Harry thought she’d enjoy it.

The next present Harry picked up was a small letter saying,

“We received your message and enclose you Christmas present. From Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia.”

Sellotaped to the note was a fifty pence piece.

“That’s friendly,” remarked Harry and promptly threw it in the bin. The next present was much more satisfactory. It was a wand holder and a packet of every flavour beans from Draco. Blaise gave him a packet of sweets that changed your eye colour and a joke present in the form of a book called ‘The Wonder and Might of our Saviour, Harry Potter.’

After opening a few cards from the other Slytherin first years there was only one present left. Unwrapping it, something fluid and silvery-grey went slythering to the floor where it lay in gleaming folds. Blaise gasped.

“That’s an invisibility cloak,” said Blaise, a look of awe on her face. “I can’t believe it. Even Draco wouldn’t be able to get his hands on one, and he’s the most spoilt kid I’ve ever set eyes on.”

Harry threw the cloak around his shoulders and looked down at his feet, but they had gone. Dashing to the mirror his reflection looked back at him, just his head suspended in mid-air, his body completely invisible.

“There’s a note,” said Blaise. “A note fell out of it.”

Harry pulled off the cloak and seized the letter. Written in narrow, loopy writing that he had never seen before were the following words:

“Your father left this in my possession before he died.

It is time it was returned to you. Use it well.

A very Merry Christmas to you.”

There was no signature.

“I wonder who sent it,” said Harry, thoughtfully.

“Who gives. You’ve got it, that’s all that matters. Better check it for curses though, you can never be too careful. Anyway, lets go eat. I’m starving,” said Blaise and Harry allowed himself to be dragged away. As they neared the Great Hall Fred and George bounded over.

“Merry Christmas!”

“Hey look, Harry’s got a Weasley jumper too!”

The twins were wearing blue jumpers, one with a large F on it, the other a G.

“Harry’s is better than ours though,” said Fred, examining it. “She obviously makes more of an effort if you’re not family. By the way, I’d stay away from Ron if I were you; he’s been in a foul mood all morning. He didn’t get as many presents as he wanted so he’s sulking and intent on making everyone else miserable too. Oh look! There’s Alicia, gotta go, see ya!”

Sitting down at the Slytherin table, Harry prepared to stuff himself with food. The whole hall was full of people laughing, pulling crackers and opening last minute presents. It was the best Christmas Harry had ever had.

After eating, Harry, Blaise, Fred, George and the rest of the Slytherin first years, who had become acclimatized to the twin’s presence, spent a happy afternoon having a furious snowball fight in the grounds. Then, cold, wet and gasping for breath, they returned to

their common rooms where Harry, Blaise and Isis played charades, which Isis ended up winning spectacularly. Grumbling about the unfairness of being beaten by a snake, Harry and Blaise made their way up to their room and fell asleep immediately. That night Harry dreamt of his invisibility cloak and all the possibilities it presented. The whole of Hogwarts was open to him with it. Harry spent a happy night thinking up ways of pranking Weasley and sneaking around without getting caught by Filch.

Chapter 15

When Draco returned to school the day before term started, he was absolutely delighted when he heard about the cloak. After the three of them had tested it for every curse under the sun (they had to enlist the help of a fifth year), they happily spent their time sneaking around playing pranks and generally creating havoc. Most of the students were convinced that there was a new ghost hanging around the castle. The teachers had even tried a couple of banishment spells, but, of course, nothing worked. Ronald Weasley was on the warpath, looking for anyone to lay the blame on, after waking up in bed one morning with his hair died pink with black polka dots and a thunder cloud hanging over his head that rained on him the whole day and gave him electric shocks every thirty seconds or so.

This was after Draco had set his mind on finding the entrance to the Gryffindor common room. Following the eldest Weasley, a pompous prefect they had heard was named Peter or Percy, they had reached a painting of a lady in pink. It took another couple of tries for them to overhear the password but eventually they got in. In Harry's opinion the Gryffindor common room wasn't half as nice as theirs. There weren't enough seats and they had no music whatsoever. The colour scheme was also a little overwhelming, but then again, maybe the Gryffs liked having glaring scarlet and gold everywhere. Personally, Harry thought that it was the worst possible combination. After setting up a couple of pranks, they had snuck out again without anyone knowing they were there, although they looked amazingly smug the next day when Ronald Weasley and all the other Gryffindor first years turned up to breakfast. Draco remarked that he thought Granger's new look was an improvement. They had shaved her head and put a shrinking spell on her so she was only around one metre high. Hers wasn't the worst, though. Dean Thomas was in tears from embarrassment after being forced into wearing a fairy costume complete with wings and tutu, and swear his undying love for Seamus Finnegan (who was forced to tap dance while singing "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" at the top of his voice). The two didn't speak to each other for a week after that event, especially as Draco took immense pleasure in reminding them of it every time he saw them.

Much to Draco's disgust the trio were spending all their time in the library revising for their summer exams. Seeing as Harry was an orphan and the Dursleys didn't give a damn, he didn't have any pressure on him at all. Draco and Blaise, on the other hand, had to study non-stop as Blaise came from a family of Ravenclaws and Draco's parents never expected anything less than the best. The only thing that made Harry work was the ambition to beat all the other houses and prove that he wasn't just a famous name and scar. He also wanted to get higher marks than Granger. She annoyed the hell out of him with her textbook answers and bossy personality.

All the teachers were loading on the homework and the library was always packed with people practicing wand movements, reciting the twelve uses of Dragons blood, etcetera while gazing longingly out the window. All the studying had everyone's nerves on edge so when Draco called Weasley "Ronniekins" on their way from potions class, he just exploded and both of them were soon fighting in the middle of the corridor. Just as Harry and Blaise joined in McGonagall came along and screamed bloody murder. Not listening to any excuses she took fifty points off both houses and gave all four of them detention.

The following morning, notes were delivered to Harry, Draco and Blaise. They were all the same.

"Your detention will take place at 11 o'clock tonight. Meet Mr Filch in the entrance Hall.

Prof. M. McGonagall."

That evening they made their way up to the meeting place feeling depressed and not a little sorry for themselves. At least they were for a short while, but no slytherin stayed down for long. It wasted valuable planning time. Once they reached the entrance Hall, they saw that Filch was already there, as was Weasley.

"Follow me," said Filch, leading them outside. They marched off across the grounds with Filch keeping up a running commentary on all the pain he had inflicted on students over the years. Harry wondered what their punishment was going to be. It must be really horrible, or Filch wouldn't be sounding so delighted. The moon was bright, but clouds scudding across it kept throwing them into darkness.

Ahead, Harry could see the lighted windows of the gamekeeper's hut. Then they heard a distant shout.

"Is that you Filch? Abou' time. I bin waitin' fer half an hour already."

Weasley let out a sigh of relief, obviously thankful at not spending the whole night with Filch.

"I suppose you think you'll be enjoying yourself with that oaf?" Mr. Filch sneered nastily. The trio all agreed that he would've been in Slytherin had he been in school. "Well, think again, kids. It's into the forest you're going and I'm much mistaken if you'll all come out alive."

At this Weasley let out a whimper and Draco stopped dead in his tracks.

"The forest?" said Draco sounding panic stricken. "We can't go in there at night – there's all sorts of things inside! Werewolves, I've heard."

"That's your lookout, isn't it?" said Filch gleefully. "Should've thought of them werewolves before you got into trouble, eh? Now you get into that forest. I'll be back at dawn, for what's left of you." He turned and started back towards the castle, his lamp bobbing away in the darkness. They could almost hear his nonexistent laughter in the air.

"Right then," said Hagrid, looking at the four. "Now, listen carefully, 'cause it's dangerous what we're gonna do tonight an' I don' want no one takin' risks. Follow me over 'ere a moment."

He led them to the very edge of the forest. Holding his lamp up high he pointed down a narrow, winding earth track that disappeared into thick, black trees.

"Look there," said Hagrid, "see that stuff shinin' on the ground? Silvery stuff? That's unicorn blood. There's a unicorn in there bin hurt badly by summat. We're gonna try an' find the poor thing. We might have ter put it out of its misery."

"And what if whatever hurt the unicorn finds us first?" said Draco fearfully.

“That would be so cool!” exclaimed Blaise excitedly. “It’s really difficult to kill a unicorn. Whatever creature hurt it must be really dangerous. Hey, do you think we’ll see it?” Draco stared at her incredulously. Personally, he would rather not go anywhere near any thing more dangerous than a flobberworm in his lifetime.

“Well, I doubt it,” answered Hagrid. “There’s nothin’ that lives in the forest that’ll hurt yeh if yer with me or Fang. Right, now, we’re gonna split inter two

groups an’ follow the trail in diff’reent directions. There’s blood all over the place. It must’ve bin staggerin’ around since las’ night at least.”

“I want Fang,” said Draco quickly, looking at Fang’s long teeth.

“All right, but I warn yeh, he’s a coward,” said Hagrid. “So me, Harry, and Blaise’ll go one way an’ Draco, Ron, and Fang’ll go the other. Now, if any of us finds the unicorn, we’ll send up green sparks, right? An’ if anyone gets in trouble, send up red sparks, an’ we’ll all come an’ get yeh-so, be carful-let’s go.”

The forest was black and silent, filling Harry with foreboding. Or, at least, that was what Harry supposed it would be doing if he wasn’t almost dead from

boredom. They had been walking for hours and Hagrid and Blaise hadn’t sopped talking once. They were discussing all the dangerous creatures living in the forest, and were becoming very good friends.

“So, are there really Manticores near here?” asked Blaise, ecstatic. “Do you think you could take me? They are so fascinating! They can kill in seconds and are extremely aggressive when someone goes onto their territory.”

“Yeh, sure I can. Manticores aren’t the best animals in these forests though. I once met a...”

The two kept on talking, swapping stories about all the kind, caring animals that tried to bite their hands off. Harry tuned out and imagined himself snuggled up in bed, dreaming about Quidditch. He was woken from his daze by Hagrid shouting.

“GET BEHIND THAT TREE!”

He pulled out an arrow and fitted it into his crossbow, raising it, ready to fire. Harry and Blaise drew their wands. Suddenly, in a clearing ahead, something moved.

“Who’s there? Show yerself!”

Into the clearing came centaur. To the waist, a man, with white-blond hair and beard, but below that was a horse’s gleaming palomino body with a long, blond tail. Harry just managed to stop himself from shouting out in surprise.

“Oh, it’s just yeh, Firenze,” said Hagrid in relief. “How are yeh?”

He walked forward and shook the centaur’s hand.

“Good evening to you, Hagrid,” said Firenze. He had a light, young voice, with great amounts of wisdom in it.

“Listen, I’m glad we’ve run in ter yeh, Firenze, ‘cause there’s a unicorn bin hurt. Yeh seen anythin’?”

Firenze didn’t answer immediately. He stared unblinkingly upwards, and then sighed. “Mars is bright tonight. Always the innocent are the first victims,” he said. “so it has been for ages past, so it is now.”

“Mars is bright?” said Blaise. “Isn’t that something to do with war coming?”

“Ah, so they do teach you something up in that school. That is good. There is something evil in this forest, I would not stray to deep inside. Go home, it would be safer.”

After trying to get more information from the centaur, Hagrid eventually gave up in frustration and they continued onwards, much to Harry’s alarm. The centaur said to go back. Instead they were walking steadily into danger, something Harry did not think would be very beneficial for his health, but Blaise and Hagrid seemed happy enough. They had just passed a bend in the path when Blaise grabbed Hagrid’s arm.

“Look! Red sparks, the others are in trouble!”

“You two wait here!” Hagrid shouted. “Stay on the path, I’ll come back fer yeh.”

After what seemed like ages, Hagrid returned dragging Ronald, Draco, and Fang with him. He was obviously in a very bad mood. Draco, it seemed, had sneaked up behind Weasley and grabbed him for a joke. Weasley had panicked and sent up the sparks. After ordering Harry to accompany Draco instead of Weasley, the group split up again, everyone much happier than before. Harry was finally free from listening to Hagrid’s and Blaise’s chatter and instead spent his time congratulating Draco on his prank. They walked on, devising more plans for Weasleys humiliation, not noticing that the unicorn blood was getting thicker and the trees were leaning in all around them. As Harry was laughing over the image of Roniekins running around kissing Neville’s toad in an effort to turn it into a princess, he saw something white and gleaming lying on the ground in a clearing ahead.

“Look,” he murmured, holding out his arm to stop Draco. It was the unicorn. Harry had never seen anything so beautiful and sad. It was staggering around, obviously in great pain, with a deep, bloody gash along its side. Telling Draco to run back to the others and get help, Harry stepped forward and, running his wand along the wound, muttered a Parseltongue spell, healing it. Softly, it touched Harry with its horn, then turned and galloped off through the trees. Harry was just about to back away when he heard a slithering sound which made him freeze where he stood.

Out of the shadows, a hooded figure came crawling across the ground like a predator circling its prey. It was moving swiftly towards him. Pulling out his wand, Harry tried to curse the advancing figure, but a pain pierced his head like he’d never felt it before. It was as if his scar was on fire. Half-blinded, he staggered backwards. He heard hooves behind him, galloping, and something jumped clean over him, charging at the figure.

The pain was so bad he fell to his knees. It took a minute or two for the pain to eventually pass. When he looked up, the figure had gone.

In its place was the most breathtaking creature he had ever seen. It was a Unicorn, but it was pure black, with fire burning in its eyes and around its hooves. It was beautiful, but in a different way from the Light Unicorn. Instead of a feeling of peace and goodness, he got a feeling of strength and power. He felt like he could conquer the world. He

reached out his hand to it, but it, too, turned and disappeared into the surrounding forest, leaving Harry with a sense of loss.

Crashing and shouts from behind him alerted him to the arrival of his friends. Getting up, he walked towards them, his head spinning with questions which he doubted anyone would know the answer to.

Chapter 16:

After coming out of the forbidden forest, the trio had rushed down into their common room. After getting his breath back, Harry told Blaise and Draco what had happened in the forest.

“-And then this black unicorn galloped into the clearing and chased away the creature, whatever it was,”

“Wow, Harry, that must have been a Darkhorn, or as some people call them, Fallen Unicorns. They are even more powerful than Light Unicorns, and-”

“Who cares,” interrupted Draco. Blaise carried on regardless.

“They are much harder to kill. A Darkhorn is not evil, contrary to what most people think. Nor are they light. They are neutral; grey I suppose you could say. While Unicorns only tolerate innocent people, Darkhorns don’t seem to differentiate between dark and light wizards. One theory is that they maintain a balance of power in the world. They will fight against any truly evil or good wizard if they feel the power is uneven. They are powerful and very dangerous. Normally though, they keep to themselves, they are much more reclusive than Light Unicorns. For many years they were thought to be mere myth. They like to live in shadow and-“

“Enough already,” drawled Draco. “Harry almost got himself killed and you’re babbling about some freak creature’s habitat. This is not the time for a COMC lesson.”

“Hey, I just thought a little background knowledge wouldn’t hurt,” replied Blaise offended.

“And what do you mean by saying I almost got myself killed? It wasn’t my fault it attacked me,” complained Harry.

“Look, if you see some strange creature attacking a Unicorn you do not, I repeat, do *not* run in like a brainless Gryffindor. Instead you should have evaluated the situation and then run as fast as possible in the opposite direction.”

"I couldn't just let the Unicorn die!" yelled Harry. "And I didn't know the creature was there. I don't even know what it was. All I know is that it made my scar hurt like crazy."

"Harry, all I'm saying is that you should be careful," said Draco calmly. "There are rumours that Voldemort is gaining strength. He did not die that night ten years ago. I was merely a set back. A rather big set back I admit, but now he is trying to find a way to return."

"What has that got to do with me getting attacked?" asked Harry.

"Oh, I get it!" said Blaise to Draco.

"Will someone explain to me what's going on?" asked Harry, pissed off at being the only one in the dark.

"Look," said Blaise exasperatedly. "Unicorns blood will keep you alive, even if you are an inch from death. The only draw back is that you will have a cursed life for having slain something pure and defenceless. Now, only someone with a back up plan would do something as stupid as that. We know that the Philosopher's Stone is at Hogwarts, and that it grants unending life, so whoever tried to kill the Unicorn probably only wanted to stay alive long enough to drink the Elixir of Life- something that will bring you back to full strength and power."

"Oh!" said Harry, cottoning on. "You think that Voldemort is the one trying to get the Stone? He was that thing in the forest?"

"Hurray," said Draco sarcastically. "The great Harry Potter finally got through his thick head what we've been trying to tell him for the past half hour."

Harry just ignored him. He was pacing up and down in front of the fire, his mind going over all the possibilities he could think of.

"So, Voldemort wants the Stone, and is waiting in the forest. Snape's a deatheater, and might be trying to kill me, or Quirrell is, or both. What if the two of them are working for Voldemort and are trying to steal the Stone for him? If that's true, we are so screwed."

"Harry, relax. We can't do anything about it now, anyway," said Blaise.

"I guess you're right," said Harry reluctantly. "We just have to keep an eye out. No one, not even Voldemort, would try anything with Dumbledore in the castle. I may not like the old man, but I've got to admit he's a powerful wizard. We just have to make sure he doesn't leave the castle."

"Glad to see you have some sense," drawled Draco.

"Enough talking already," said Blaise. "I'm hungry, let's go get something to eat. We've done enough theorising over who's out to get us."

Never ones to say no to food, Harry and Draco quickly grabbed the invisibility cloak before following Blaise out of the common room and down to the kitchens. They were almost at the entrance when they heard the sound of someone walking towards them. All three of them tried to run in opposite directions. On second thoughts, maybe that wasn't the cleverest thing to do, as *the cloak slipped to the ground and Harry mentally cursed everything he could in his head. Blaise was in a panic, as footsteps approached quickly. She froze in horror, oblivious to Harry and Draco beckoning her to come back under the Invisibility Cloak. "How much I wish I was the red-headed prefect right now..." Blaise thought. Her skin felt liquidy for a second before she felt taller than before and felt her cheeks and nose become itchy. She fought the urge to scratch it.*

She saw Professor McGonagall round the bend and, before she could react, the Transfiguration nodded at her in approval.

"Good work, Percy, you are doing your job well," the strict teacher said before walking off. Blaise blinked in confusion and was speechless. She just nodded weakly back at the professor and heard Professor McGonagall walk off. Her footsteps faded and Blaise collapsed to the floor silently. Again, she felt a tingle in her skin, and she felt normal.

Harry and Draco opened a gap in the Invisibility Cloak and she scurried under it, where they ran to the kitchens as fast and silent as possible. When they reached the kitchens, the two boys started questioning her at a furious rate while the elves prepared their food.

"Why didn't you tell us you were a Metamorphmagus?"

"I didn't know!"

"How'd you do it?"

"I don't know!"

"Why'd you do it?"

"Was that your first time?"

"Why didn't you get back under the cloak?"

"AGH! I DON'T KNOW, DAMMIT!" shouted Blaise in frustration.

"Hey, calm down, you should be celebrating, not biting our heads off," said Harry.

"Yeah, metamorphmagi are really rare. I would give anything to be one," Draco said enviously.

"I guess," said Blaise uncertainly. Now that she came to think about it, it was really cool. She could turn into anyone she wanted. Nothing was beyond her, no place closed, no secret hidden...

"Hey! Earth to Blaise!" said Harry waving his hand in front of her face.

"Oh, sorry," mumbled Blaise dreamily. "I was just thinking of all the possibilities."

"Yeah, imagine all the pranks we could play," said Harry enthusiastically. Draco nodded in agreement.

"Can't you think of anything except pranks," said Blaise crossly.

"No," said Harry, a grin on his face.

"You're impossible," huffed Blaise.

"Okay, then think of all the blackmail material we could gather. Or how easy it would be to spy on people."

“That’s more like it,” said Blaise, grinning and going off into her dream world again, only to be brought back to the present by Draco asking her to morph herself again. Screwing up her face in concentration, Blaise willed herself to change into Pansy Parkinson. Unfortunately, no matter how hard she tried, nothing happened. Frowning, she tried to turn into the red haired prefect. Again, nothing happened.

“Dammit! Why won’t it work,” wailed Blaise in frustration.

“Maybe you just need practise. Or maybe you have to be under pressure,” said Draco soothingly.

It takes a couple of months to train a Metamorphmagus’s power’s hissed Isis helpfully from around Harry’s neck. After translating to the others, Harry said, “We don’t know much about how it works. Why don’t we just wait until tomorrow, and then look in the library for some information,”

After the expected protesting from Draco, they agreed, and, after eating the food brought to them by the house-elves, made their way back up to their dormitories.

The next day Harry was woken by something heavy bouncing up and down on his bed. Blearily opening his eyes he saw it was Blaise.

“Up! Now!”

Mumbling incoherently, Harry made his way to the bathroom while Blaise moved on to Draco. Coming out of the shower, Harry was just in time to see a soaking Draco sitting up in bed yelling at a guilty Blaise, who was ineffectually trying to hide a water jug behind her back. Deciding to get out of the way before hexes started to fly around the room, Harry made his way down to breakfast. Just as Harry was reaching for his fifth cup of coffee, the other two came in, Draco sprouting tentacles all over his face and Blaise sporting a sign over her head saying “Draco Malfoy is King. Blaise Zabini is the Scum of the Earth.”

Luckily they were the first ones down to breakfast so they were spared the humiliation of letting the Gryffindors catch sight of them.

As soon as they finished their breakfast, Blaise dragged them to the library and they began the tedious job of looking for a book on Metamorphmagi from a choice of millions. After an hour of searching they finally found what they were looking for. It turned out that Metamorphmagi were born, not made, and their powers normally emerged around puberty. Although Isis was right about it taking a couple of months to learn control, it was a relatively easy skill to master, as the knowledge was inborn. It said that metamorphmagi could change their appearances at will, but only into human forms. There had been a couple of instances where a metamorph could grow an extra hand, arm etc. but it took many years of dedication and study so not many bothered. Metamorphmagi also had enhanced transfiguration skills. The thing that caught their attention though, was the fact that a metamorphmagus had to register themselves immediately after their first transformation. Not to do so was illegal and would be severely punished.

“Are you going to register?” asked Harry.

“Hell no!” said Blaise. “The only way I can get anything out of this is if I’m not registered. If people know I’m a Metamorphmagus, then they’ll be on their guard.”

“But what if someone does find out? You can go to prison for it.”

“Well, no one will find out, will they?” said Blaise. “There is no real way for the ministry to control things like this. Even if someone does see me morphing, then I just have to say it was my first time.”

“Guess that makes sense,” said Harry, thoughtfully. “but we can’t borrow any of these books, or else Madam Pince will suspect something’s up. I think there might be some books in the Parseltongue library we found. There’s a parsel-spell to translate books into other languages so it will be possible for you to use them.”

“Great! Thanks Harry,”

“Okay, I’ve spent enough of my time in this bloody library. Let’s move,” drawled Draco.

“Yeah, I suppose we should. Potions will start soon. Come on,” said Harry walking out of the library with Draco, dragging a reluctant Blaise behind them.

“Come on guys. Let me go. I want to know more about my new super powers.”

“Shut up!”

“Aww, am I making Drakie-poo jealous?”

“SHUT UP!”

Chapter 17:

“Bloody hell! If I hear one more word out of you, Draco, I swear I’ll curse you into the next millennia!”

Harry was pissed off. It was the week of the exams, and Harry and Draco were trying to squeeze in some last minute revision. Unfortunately for Harry, Blaise had disappeared and Isis was nowhere to be found, leaving Harry to deal with Draco’s complaints alone while still trying to memorize the twelve uses of dragon’s blood. Needless to say, he was feeling anything but pleased. Just as Harry was berating Draco for setting fire to his notes (Draco was taking out his frustration on his Charms revision) Ronald Weasley showed up, obviously looking for a fight.

“Shut up, go away, and leave us the hell alone before you hurt yourself,” said Harry before the redhead could open his mouth.

“Make me,” said Ronald, adopting what he obviously hoped was an intimidating scowl, but which just gave him a slightly constipated look.

Sneering at the childish comeback, Harry drew his wand and pointed it directly at the Gryffindor. Weasley flinched and moved away slightly so as the wand was not touching his chest.

“Leave now, or you will regret it. I have just been revising Defence Against the Dark Arts and have been looking for someone to test the curses on.”

Glaring, Weasley backed down, muttering under his breath about “slimy Slytherins who think they own everything”.

“Correction, we don’t *think* we own everything, we know we do,” drawled Draco as he closed his Charms textbook, *Standard Book of Spells, Grade 1*. “You, on the other hand, own nothing except hand-me-down robes and a bad haircut.”

Smirking, the two Slytherins turned back to their work, totally ignoring the Weasel, who, finally realising he couldn’t win, left in defeat.

“Well that was fun,” remarked Draco. “Annoying Weasley always puts me in a good mood.”

“Mmm,” said Harry, turning back to his work. “It’s a pity that Blaise missed it, she’s so talented at thinking up insults.”

Harry had hardly seen Blaise in the past couple of days. She spent her whole time down in the depths of the castle, researching Metamorphmagi. She refused to show the two boys how far she had come, and had placed heavy wards around her, which electrocuted anyone within twenty feet. She had given up on the idea of studying, saying that if she didn’t yet know how to make a pineapple tap dance across a desk, it was unlikely that she ever would. She did turn up for the actual exams though, and complained along with the rest of them at having to transfigure a mouse into a snuffbox.

Harry did the best he could, trying to ignore the stabbing pains in his forehead, which had been bothering him since his trip into the forest. He had a permanent headache, but that could just be from the sweltering heat. The classrooms in which they did their written exams were particularly awful. The professors didn’t seem to know the meaning of cooling charms, leaving the students to struggle valiantly on, desperately waiting for it all to end. They had been given special, new quills for the exams that had been bewitched with Anti-Cheating spells. Most of the Slytherins were, as usual, trying to cheat, and were trying their hardest to bribe or blackmail information on how to get round the spells from their fellow students. Unfortunately, Harry, Draco and Blaise couldn’t get their hands on any counter curses or loopholes, and had to content themselves with being reluctantly honest. Harry had tried to talk Nemesis into sneaking into the exams and whispering all the answers to him, but it didn’t work. Nemesis had chosen just that week to visit some friends of hers in the forbidden forest, and refused to stay and help him out.

You traitor! hissed Harry, indignantly. **As soon as I need you, you disappear.**

Well excusssse me for wanting a ssssocial life. You sssshould have assssked me earlier. My entire being doesssn’t revolve around you, you know, hissed Isis in return. **And another thing,**

how the hell do you expect me to memorizzzzze everything in the sssspace of two daysssss, when you've had an entire year and ssssstill don't know it?

Okay, so you might have a point. I still think its cruel of you to abandon me to my fate though.

Harry, It'sss jussst an exam. It isssn't the end of the world. Honesssstly, you humanssss, you alwaysssss overreact.

Hey! I resent that! And you're starting to sound like Blaise. Harry hissed, grinning.

And I'm sssupossed to care why? Blai(sssssse is ssssssomeone that you should be proud to sssssound like. smirked Isis in return. Anyway, I've got to go. I've got a date with a very attractive viper I met lasssst week.

Good luck! Don't do anything I wouldn't do! called Harry after the retreating form of his friend before setting off in search of Draco, resigned to having to get through the exams without any illicit help.

For the most part, Harry did okay. He always enjoyed Defense Against the Dark Arts and Charms, and Potions wasn't that bad either. The very last exam was the worst. It was History of Magic, which, in Harry's opinion, was the most boring subject on earth. Listening to Professor Binns drone on about goblin rebellions was a form of mental torture. After one hour of answering questions about batty old wizards who invented self-stirring cauldron, they were free – free for a whole wonderful week until their exam results came out. The whole school lazed around by the lake, basking in the sun, and the Slytherin prefects had arranged another party in their common room, which Harry was definitely looking forward to.

That evening at dinner, as they were discussing what they were going to do during the holidays, Harry realised with a jolt of foreboding that Dumbledore wasn't there. The senile old wizard had never missed a meal before, and Harry was definitely worried.

"Um, do you know where Dumbledore's got to?" he asked Lucretia Parks, a sixth year prefect.

“Oh, he’s been called away for an urgent meeting at the Ministry of Magic. At least, I think it was something like that. Professor McGonnagal was telling me and I didn’t bother to pay any attention. Why do you care anyway?” The girl asked suspiciously.

“Oh, no reason,” said Harry, trying to sound off-hand and nonchalant but failing miserably as he was filled with dread.

“Are you planning a prank or what?” asked the prefect good-naturedly. “If you are, don’t worry about it. I won’t tell anyone. You really have to work on your deception skills though. A Hufflepuff would no you were lying.”

Nodding weakly and muttering his thanks, Harry hurriedly got up from the table, grabbed Blaise and Draco, and practically ran from the hall.

“Hey, what the hell was that for,” said Blaise, pissed off. “I didn’t get to hear the end of Theo’s joke and I haven’t finished eating.”

“Look, whoever’s after the stone will try to get it tonight,” whispered Harry urgently. “Dumbledore isn’t here, he’s left the castle. The thief won’t pass this chance up.”

“Shit! What the hell should we do?” asked Blaise.

“Erm, I haven’t thought that far yet,” admitted Harry.

“Leave the planning to me,” drawled Draco firmly. “I’m the only one with any brains around here. Okay, let me see. Um...no, that wouldn’t work. Maybe...um,err,”

“For someone who keeps reminding us how clever he is, you aren’t doing a very good job,” smirked Harry.

“Shut up and let me think!” snapped Draco, put out. After a couple of minutes of deep thought, he finally said, “Okay, I’ve got it figured. I’ll go down the Parseltongue passageway and try and get the stone before Quirrell or Snape get it. As soon as I have it, I’ll run back to the common room. There’s no point me hanging around and getting killed. You two should head to the third floor corridor and try to get through the enchantments guarding the Stone. That way, if I get there and the

Stone's already gone, you can try and stop anyone going past as you'll be blocking the exit. Don't hang around for too long though. You guys wouldn't last a minute against a fully trained wizard. Just grab the Stone and leave. If things look really bad, Blaise can morph into Dumbledore and pretend to come to our rescue. Whoever is trying to steal the stone will hopefully be scared away by the sight of the Headmaster."

"But I can't morph properly yet," pointed out Blaise.

"Well you'll just have to try harder, won't you," replied Draco impatiently.

"What if the both Quirrell and Snape are there?" asked Harry. "We couldn't possibly manage to hold our own against both of them."

"If that happens, you'll either have to fight them and get killed, or, a much better idea, distract them long enough for us to come and help you," drawled Draco. "To get the Stone or die trying is our objective here."

"Yeah, you're right," agreed Harry, solemnly. "If we don't get it, Voldemort will return and the Wizarding World will be plunged into darkness. Thousands of innocent people would lose their lives."

"Okay," drawled Draco. "I was more thinking along the lines of us getting unending life and riches, but hey, whatever works for you. Anyway, does everyone know what they're doing?" Without waiting for an answer, he continued, "Good, let's go then."

Splitting up, the three Slytherins went their own ways. Draco slowly sauntered off towards the dungeons, looking like he hadn't got a care in the world, and Blaise and Harry ran up to the third floor corridor. Once they got there, they saw that the door was already open. Fearlessly, Blaise strode into the room, with Harry creeping along behind her, convinced that at any second he'd become dog food. He needn't have worried though. Once inside, he saw the monster lying on the ground, a harp playing a lullaby beside it.

"Awww, look. Little Fluffy's asleep. Doesn't he look so cute?" said Blaise, making baby noises.

“Err, yeah, sure,” said Harry dubiously, eyeing the monster with distaste. When Blaise glared at him, he hurriedly continued. “Of course you’re right. Giant three-headed dogs drooling all over the floors are absolutely adorable. Now can we get going before he wakes up?”

“Alright then,” said Blaise reluctantly. “I suppose I can visit Fluffy later.”

After lifting up the trap door in the middle of the room, Harry and Blaise looked at each other. “Erm, so do you want to go first?” asked Blaise. Cautiously Harry stepped closer, and looked down over the edge of the trap door. There was no sign of the bottom.

“No thanks, I think I’ll pass,” said Harry hastily. Just as he was about to back away, Blaise reached out and pushed him, hard, sending him flying face forwards through the hole. Cold, damp air rushed past him as he fell down, down, down, and –

FLUMP. With a funny, muffled sort of thump he landed on something soft.

“Fuck! Blaise, what the hell did you do that for!” growled Harry, letting off a stream of expletives.

“Oh, don’t be such a wuss, you didn’t hurt yourself, did you. Now stop feeling sorry for yourself and tell me what’s down there.” said Blaise. Still muttering curses under his breath, Harry sat up and felt around, his eyes not used to the gloom. It felt as though he was sitting on some plant of some kind. He was just about to shout up at Blaise to come down, when he realised that the plant was slowly twisting snakelike tendrils around his ankles. Struggling, Harry managed to free himself before the plant got a firm grip on him. He recognised it from Herbology. He couldn’t remember the name, but he knew it was a man-eating plant which hated warmth and bright light. Standing far out of reach of it, with an evil grin on his face, Harry called up,

“It’s OK! It’s a soft landing, you can jump!” Blaise followed straight away and landed sprawling right in the middle of the plant.

“What’s this thing doing here?” she asked, not seeming to notice that it was starting to curl round her legs and arms. “Is it supposed to break the fall or what?”

“Don’t ask me,” shrugged Harry, inwardly jumping with joy, as his friend got more and more tangled up in the plant. It took a few more seconds for Blaise to notice anything was wrong. When she did she let out a blood-curdling shriek.

“Help! It’s attacking me!” she cried while struggling to free herself. “Don’t just stand there, Harry. Help me!”

“Hmm,” said Harry, pretending to think it over. “How about no.”

“Harry please,” wailed Blaise in panic as she tried to pull the plant off her but only succeeded to make it worse. “I’ll do anything you say.”

“Alright then,” said Harry gleefully. “Repeat after me. ‘I, Blaise’.”

“I, Blaise,” she spat out, obviously knowing what was going to come next.

“Admit that Harry Potter is supreme ruler of the entire universe, and that he is the most good-looking guy I have ever seen.”

Unwillingly, Blaise choked out the words. As soon as she did so, Harry raised his wand and conjured up a small fire. In a matter of seconds, the plant loosened its grip as it cringed away from the light and warmth. Wriggling and flailing, it unravelled itself from Blaise’s body, and she was able to pull free.

“Just you wait,” she growled at a laughing Harry. “When we get out of here...”

“This was for pushing me down the fucking trap door,” said Harry. “We’re even. Now stop complaining and let’s get out of here.”

Still glowering, Blaise followed Harry down a stone passageway, which was the only way on. All they could hear apart from their footsteps was the gentle drip of water trickling down the walls. After carrying on for what seemed like hours, Blaise whispered.

“Can you here something?”

Harry listened. A soft rustling and clinking seemed to be coming from up ahead. Gripping their wands tightly, they reached the end of the tunnel and saw before them a brilliantly lit chamber, its ceiling arching high above them. It was full of small, jewel-bright birds, fluttering and tumbling all around the room. On the opposite side was a heavy, wooden door.

“Do you think they’ll attack us if we cross the room?” said Blaise.

“Well, they don’t look very vicious,” replied Harry. “We may as well try. Better be quick though.”

Taking a deep breath, they sprinted across the room, expecting to feel sharp beaks or claws tearing at them at any second, but nothing happened. They reached the door untouched. Harry reached out and pulled at the handle, but it was locked. He tugged and heaved at the door, but it wouldn’t budge. Not even when Blaise tried the Alohamora charm.

“Now what?” said Harry.

Not answering, Blaise grabbed a hair pin from her head, and bent down to the key-hole, picking the lock. With a small click, the lock slid back, allowing the door to be opened. Blaise grinned at Harry’s dumbfounded expression.

“What, never seen anyone pick a lock before?”

“Well no, but that’s not the point,” said Harry. “I just don’t see why anyone guarding something as precious as the Philosopher’s Stone would make a door that could be opened by a mere Muggle!”

“Well, not many wizards know how to open doors with hair pins. They consider it beneath them,” replied Blaise. “Now come on, we’ve wasted enough time as it is.”

Opening the door, the two Slytherins stepped through the doorway into a room that flooded with light as soon as they stepped into it. Harry stared around in astonishment. They were standing on the

edge of a huge chessboard. Black and white chessmen, which were at least two metres tall and carved from stone, were standing to attention at either side of the board. Behind the white pieces they could see another door.

“Now what do we do?” asked Blaise.

“It’s obvious, isn’t it?” said Harry. “We’ve got to play our way across the room.”

“How exactly?”

“I think,” said Harry, “we’re going to have to be chessmen.”

He walked up to a black knight and put his hand out touch the knight’s horse. At once, the stone sprang to life. The horse pawed the ground and the knight turned his helmeted head to look down at Harry.

“Do we – er – have to join you to get across?” asked Harry nervously. The black knight nodded. Harry turned round to Blaise.

“This wants thinking about...” he said. “I suppose we have to take the places of two black pieces. Blaise, you can be a bishop, and I-”

“Screw this,” said Blaise impatiently. Pulling out her wand, she shouted “Diffindo!” blowing up three of the pieces nearest her. Catching on, Harry also started shooting spells around. The chessmen tried to fight back, but they weren’t fast enough. Between the two of them, Harry and Blaise soon had all the chessmen on the floor in pieces.

“Well that was easy,” remarked Harry as Blaise dusted herself off. “Anyone could steal the damn Stone if it’s all this simple.”

Making their way to the door, they stepped through. A disgusting smell hit them, making both of them pull their robes up over their noses. Eyes watering, they saw, flat on the floor in front of them, a massive troll out cold with a bloody lump on its head.

“I’m glad we didn’t have to fight that one,” Harry remarked.

“Tell me about it,” said Blaise wrinkling her nose in disgust. “I mean, hasn’t that troll ever heard of a bath.”

“Obviously not,” choked out Harry. “Come on, I can’t breathe.”

He pulled open the next door and the two of them practically ran into the next room in their desperate attempt to get rid of the awful smell around them. As soon as they entered, flames sprang up behind them, blocking their exit. It wasn’t ordinary fire either; it was purple. At that same instant, black flames shot up in the doorway leading onwards. They were trapped. In the centre of the room stood a table with seven differently shaped bottles on it.

“Look!” Blaise seized a roll of paper lying next to the bottles. Harry look over her shoulder as she read it. It said:

Danger lies before you, while safety lies behind,

Two of us will help you, whichever you would find,

One among us seven will let you move ahead,

Another will transport the drinker back instead,

Two among our number hold only nettle wine,

Three of us our killers, waiting hidden in line.

Choose, unless you wish to stay here for ever more,

To help you in your choice, we give you these clues four:

First, however slyly the poison tries to hide

You will always find some on nettle wine’s left side;

Second, different are those who stand at either end,

But if you move onward, neither is your friend;

Third, as you see clearly, all are different size,

Neither dwarf nor giant holds death in their insides;

Fourth, the second left and the second on the right

Are twins once you taste them, though different at first sight.

"This must be by Professor Snape," said Harry. "We've already had Flitwicks, he must have charmed those birds, not that they were very useful. Sprouts was that man eating plant, and McGonagall transfigured the chessmen to make them alive."

"I never knew Snape was so poetical," remarked Blaise. "I wish he had been a bit clearer though. I can't make head or tail of this."

"Fuck! I don't have a clue either. I was hoping you would," frowned Harry. "So what do we do now then?"

"Well, we'll just have to test all the potions. I'll transfigure us some mice, they're easy enough to do, and then we can force feed them small amounts of the potions. If they die, then we know we gave them a poison."

"That still leaves us with four potions to choose from."

"We'll just have to send them through the fires then. Happy?"

"Not very," said Harry. "But I guess it's the best plan we've got."

Brandishing her wand, Blaise transfigured some stones on the ground into seven mice. After pouring a different potion down each ones throat, she sat back to watch them take effect. After a couple of seconds, one of the mice started to smoke, and soon burst into flames. A couple of seconds later, two others were killed off as well. One seemed be unable to breath, while the other expanded until it burst with a loud popping sound.

"Charming," said Harry sarcastically. "Trust Snape to think up such gruesome ways to die."

Blaise ignored him, busy levitating a mouse through the fire behind them. Nothing happened.

“Okay, so we know how to get back,” said Blaise happily. “That’s something anyway.”

After a couple more experiments, they found that the smallest bottle allowed them to go forwards though the black fire. Frowning, Harry looked at the tiny bottle.

“There’s only enough there for one of us,” he said. “That’s hardly one swallow.” They looked at each other.

“Okay, here’s what we do,” said Blaise. “You take that one, and go forward. I’ll take the one that lets you go back. I’ll try and go through the secret passage and get in that way. You’ll probably need back up.”

“Okay, deal,” said Harry picking up the smallest bottle and draining it. It was like ice was flooding through his body. With one last wave at Blaise, he put the bottle down and walked forward, through the black flames. It was the strangest sensation. He could see the flames, licking at his body but couldn’t feel them. After a couple of moments of seeing nothing but dark fire, he was on the other side, in the last chamber. The first thing Harry saw the Mirror of Erised standing in the middle of the room, and in front of it was a man. His heart sinking, Harry realised he had come to late. Deciding that he may as well try to fight, Harry raised his wand and shouted “*Stupefy!*” The man dodged the spell, which missed him by inches. Whipping around, the man turned to face Harry. It was Quirrell.

“Ah, I was wondering whether I’d be meeting you here, Potter,” said Quirrell calmly. *Well*, thought Harry, *At least I don’t have to deal with Snape as well.*

“Surprised Potter? No doubt you didn’t expect me, p-p-poor st-st-stuttering Professor Quirrell, to be here.” It was then that Harry noticed that Quirrell’s stutter had completely disappeared. *I’d better do as Draco said and keep him talking*, thought Harry.

“So it was all an act then? Really, you should make more of an effort. I suspected it was you all along,” said Harry smirking.

“What!” cried Quirrell, nonplussed. “How?”

“Well, you trying to kill me at that Quidditch match was a small clue,” said Harry sarcastically. “Of course, it could have been Snape, but he’s not such a fool as to try and murder someone in front of the whole school.”

“Oh, you think you’re so clever boy, don’t you,” replied Quirrell, glaring at him nastily. “Yes, your dear Potions master wasn’t involved. In fact, he was muttering the counter-curse. I’d have had you off that broom in seconds if he hadn’t interfered. No matter, I’ll just have to kill you now instead.”

Quirrell waved his wand and muttered a binding curse. Throwing up a shield, Harry deflected the spell back to Quirrell. Ropes sprang out of thin air and wrapped themselves tightly around the man. Knowing he had only a short amount of time to get the stone, Harry rushed to the mirror and looked into it. *I have to find the stone; I have to find the stone* thought Harry in desperation. *If I don’t get it, Voldemort will come back into full power..* In the mirror, his reflection stared back at him, then smirked. It put its hand into its pocket and pulled out a blood-red stone. Still wearing a smug grin, Harry’s reflection winked and put the Stone back in its robes. As it did so, Harry felt something heavy drop into his real pocket. Somehow – incredibly – he’d got the Stone.

Just at that moment, Quirrell managed to break through the curse binding him, and shot another spell at Harry, freezing him where he stood. Suddenly a high, cold voice spoke, though Quirrell wasn’t moving his lips.

“Let me speak to him...face to face...”

“Master, you are not strong enough!” said Quirrell.

“I have strength enough for this...”

As Harry was ineffectually trying to break through the curse rooting him to the spot, Quirrell reached up and began to unwrap his turban. Confused, Harry watched as the turban fell away. Slowly, Quirrell turned round. Where there should have been a back to Quirrell’s head, there was a face. It was chalk white with glaring red eyes and slits for nostrils, like a snake.

"Harry Potter," it whispered. Harry tried to reach his wand, but he still couldn't move.

"See what I have become?" said the face. "Mere shadow and vapour...I have form only when I share another's body... but there have always been those willing to let me into their hearts and minds...Unicorn blood has strengthened me these past weeks. Once I have the Elixir of Life, I will be able to create a body of my own...Now...why don't you give me that Stone in your pocket?"

So he knew. The feeling suddenly surged back into Harry's body, and he backed away, reaching for his wand.

"Don't be a fool," snarled the face. "One thing that you have yet to learn, is that there is no good or evil, only power, and those too weak to seek it. Better save your own life and join me... or you'll meet the same end as your parents...they died begging me for mercy."

This was obviously the wrong thing to say. Before, Harry was all-out terrified, but now he was raging with anger. Harry refused to let *anyone*, especially some psychotic megalomaniac, insult his parents. His body started to pulse with power, and with a deadly glare on his face, he started to attack. Soon curses were flying around the room. After dodging a dark cutting spell and three others Harry had never even heard of, he was finally hit with a disarming charm. His wand went flying out of his hand, leaving him without a weapon. Before Voldemort could cast another spell, Harry attacked again, this time physically. At last all his Karate lessons were paying off. Voldemort was obviously not expecting the attack, and was caught by surprise. After Harry had landed a couple of kicks and punches, making Quirrell double up in pain, Voldemort cried out,

"**Seize him!**" Obeying his master, Quirrell started fighting back and managed to grab Harry around the neck. Harry yelled in agony as his scar exploded in pain. But to his surprise, he wasn't the only one screaming. Quirrell had let go of him, and was hunched in pain, looking at his fingers-they were blistering before his eyes.

"**Seize him! SEIZE HIM!**" shrieked Voldemort again and Quirrell lunged, knocking Harry clean off his feet, landing on top of him, both

hands around Harry's neck. Harry's scar was almost blinding him with pain, yet he could still see Quirrell howling in agony.

"Master, I cannot hold him - my hands - my hands!"

And Quirrell, though pinning Harry to the ground with his knees, let go of his neck and stared, bewildered, at his own palms. Harry could see they looked burnt, raw, red and shiny.

"Then kill him, fool, and be done!" screeched Voldemort.

Quirrell raised his hand to perform a deadly curse, but Harry, by instinct, reached up and grabbed Quirrell's face.

"AAAAARGH!"

Quirrell rolled off him, his face blistering too, and then Harry knew: Quirrell couldn't touch his bare skin, not without suffering terrible pain. His only chance was to keep hold of Quirrell, keep him in enough pain to stop him performing the curse.

Harry jumped to his feet, caught Quirrell by the arm and hung on as tight as he could. Quirrell screamed and tried to throw Harry off. The pain in Harry's head was building. He couldn't see, he could only hear Quirrell's shrieks of pain and Voldemort's yells of "KILL HIM! KILL HIM!"

He felt Quirrell's arm wrenched from his grasp, and knew all was lost. His last thought was *Oh well, I'll just have to come back as a ghost and haunt him, instead* before he fell into blackness. Down...down...down...

Chapter 18:

Something gold was glinting just above him. The Snitch! He tried to catch it, but his arms were just too heavy. He blinked. It wasn't the snitch after all. It was a pair of glasses. How strange. He blinked again and the smiling face of Albus Dumbledore swam into view above him.

Oh shit, thought Harry. I am so screwed. He must have found me in the dungeons; he'll know I was trying to steal the stone. Okay, I can't panic. I just have to think like a Slytherin. Yeah, that's it; I have to think of a plan. Um, I'll, err, I'll make him think I was protecting the Stone! Yeah, that's a good idea. It's sort of the truth. And at least my Occlumency walls are still up so he couldn't have read my mind. Okay, let's do this.

Mentally going into what Harry called brainless Gryffindor mode, he cried, "Sir, the Stone! It was Quirrell! He's got the Stone! Sir, quick!"

"Calm yourself my dear boy, you are a little behind the times," said Dumbledore putting on a fake paternal air. "Quirrell does not have the Stone."

Smug git, thought Harry before continuing. "Then who does? Sir, I-"

"Harry, please relax, or Madame Pomfrey will have me thrown out." Dumbledore was definitely right about that. The nurse was well known for her strictness. "Tokens from you friends and admirers," Dumbledore answered, waving his hand at a table piled high with what looked like half a sweet shop. "What happened in the dungeons between you and Professor Quirrell is a complete secret. So, naturally, the whole school knows."

Giving an extremely fake laugh at Dumbledore's pathetic joke, Harry asked, "How long have I been here?" He truly wanted to know.

"Three days," replied the Professor benignly. "Mister Malfoy and Miss Zabini will be most relieved to hear you have come round. They have been extremely worried."

"But sir, what happened to the Philosopher's Stone?"

"I see you are not to be distracted. Very well, the Stone. Professor Quirrell did not manage to take it from you. I arrived in time to prevent that, although you were doing quite well by yourself, I must say."

Patronizing bastard, thought Harry, pissed off at the condescending tone Dumbledore was using. The headmaster went on, oblivious of the contempt of his audience.

"No sooner had I reached London than it became clear to me that the place I should be was the one I had just left. I arrived just in time to pull Quirrell off you. Unfortunately, the Stone was destroyed in the process."

"Destroyed?" repeated Harry blankly. Draco was going to kill him for screwing up so badly. Although at least this way Voldemort wasn't going to be able to come back to power. That at least was something.

"Why did Voldemort want to kill me?" asked Harry. This question had been bothering him for quite a while.

"Alas, I cannot tell you. Not today, not now. You will know one day, when you are ready. I know you will despise me after hearing me say this, but when you are older, you will know."

"Fine," grumbled Harry scowling. Realising that Harry was annoyed, Dumbledore seemed to think it best if he left before making it worse. Just as he was about to walk out the door he turned round and said,

"By the way, next time you try and sneak around the school, I suggest you use that admirable cloak I sent you." With that he was gone, leaving a surprised Harry behind him. *Dumbledore* had sent him the invisibility cloak? Why the hell would he do that? It gave Harry the possibility of sneaking around wherever he wanted to. Surely that wasn't something Dumbledore wanted.

He was probably trying to bribe onto his side, thought Harry. *He just wants me to like and trust him. Like that's ever going to happen.*

Dumbledore was definitely not as powerful as he led most people to believe, that Harry was sure of. The fact that he hadn't noticed one of his Professors being possessed by the spirit of an evil dark lord was

proof enough of that. He definitely wasn't infallible. From what Harry had seen and heard over the school year, he thought that Dumbledore was a quite a powerful wizard whose skills in manipulation were quite impressive, and who succeeded in making most of the world bow down to him in awe. However, he was not good enough to take in Slytherins, to whom deceit was second nature. Dumbledore's idiotic and stubborn Gryffindor characteristics shone through too often.

The Halloween feast was one such occasion. Thinking back, Harry gained a new perspective on the event. He now realised that Dumbledore probably panicked (a twenty meter tall Nundu loose in a school does that to people) but managed to keep up a calm exterior. When informed that the monster was wandering around in the dungeons, he immediately ordered all the students to go to their common rooms instead of thinking the situation over and realising that he would be sending $\frac{1}{4}$ of the students into mortal peril. When this was pointed out to him, he must have felt under threat at having his authority challenged and was too stubborn and terrified to come to his senses and change his mind.

Harry still disliked the old wizard, but felt some grudging respect for him nonetheless. For a Gryffindor, the headmaster was quite intelligent. After all, he did succeed in duping the whole world into thinking he was mega powerful and worshipping the very ground he walked on. He was also on the leader of the 'Light Side', which made a lot of people think that he helped in the defeat of Voldemort. Harry wasn't sure what being on the 'Light Side' meant. Good and evil were just labels people gave themselves or each other. They didn't actually seem to mean anything concrete. The light side wasn't completely 'good' by all accounts. Dumbledore still went around manipulating people, there was still racism, there were still ego-centric bastards who could only think of themselves.

It wasn't possible for any human to be perfect. That basic knowledge was taught to all children before they could even talk properly. What Harry didn't understand was why all adults insisted on forgetting that fact and instead thought that they or their leaders were faultless. There was no such thing as pure good. Harry was also not sure if anyone could be pure evil either.

Many people would say that Voldemort hadn't a shred of good in him. He killed millions of people. He was the darkest and most powerful dark lord in centuries. Yet Harry just couldn't believe that he was the epitome of evil. It wouldn't make sense. There had to be a balance. You couldn't have 100 evil and only around 70 good.

Then, suddenly, unbidden, the memory of Voldemort's voice came into his head.

"There is no good or evil. There is only power, and those too weak to seek it."

Harry had to admit he agreed with Voldemort on that one, at least the first part. It made sense and explained a lot of things. Take for example Dumbledore and Voldemort, two wizards of high power. They were both at either end of a spectrum. One side labelled 'good' and the other labelled 'evil'. The two wizards balanced the spectrum, effectively cancelling each other out. Harry assumed this meant that they would be locked in a pointless power struggle, where either no one could win, or both wizards killed one another.

Harry wasn't certain what would happen if a 'grey' wizard or witch took over. That one person would be in the middle of every battle – the centre of everyone's attention and questions. That one wizard – *or witch*, he added mentally, wincing inwardly at what Blaise would say if she had heard him leave out that part – would be a perfect balance on his or her own, and therefore would not have to spend his life fighting and in the end ending up dead. Harry just wasn't sure what it took to be grey. It was obviously the best choice as it guaranteed a much higher chance of survival. If you were light or dark, there would always be more wizards ready to step forward in your enemies' place, and sooner or later you'd be killed. If you were grey, the light and dark wizards would be too busy fighting one another to bother with you, as you would appear to be neutral and therefore less of a threat.

But how was anyone to become grey? Harry supposed it meant being good and evil at the same time, and the only way he could think of at the moment to do that was to use both light and dark magic.

Well, thought Harry, that shouldn't be too difficult. I'm already on my jolly way there. That was true. Even though he wasn't allowed into the Restricted Area of the library, which was where all the school's Dark Arts books were kept, he had access to the Parseltongue library that was filled with thousands of books on all kinds of magic. Light, dark, and some that he wasn't even sure about. It would be easy enough for Harry to learn illegal magic. The only problem was that all the spells were in Parseltongue and were so complicated to learn, Harry couldn't really be bothered to make the effort. He had a hard enough time remembering simple spells like stunning or levitating charms. Another possibility was to ask Draco for some Dark arts manuals. Harry was sure that he had some hidden in that manor of his. Deciding to ask him the next day, Harry snuggled down under the covers of his bed. His eyelids closed and he fell fast asleep, exhausted.

"Just five minutes," Harry pleaded.

"Absolutely not."

"Pleeeeeease? I'll be extra good,"

"Out of the question."

"You let professor Dumbledore in."

"That was the headmaster, quite different."

Madame Pomfrey was a nice woman, he'd give her that, but very strict. Actually, Harry thought strict was an understatement. If she had her way, you'd stay in bed for a week if you went to her with a slight headache. Madame Pomfrey's concern about her patients had past the border on fanatic, and was in a place that would take a whole dictionary to explain.

Harry was trying to get her to allow Draco and Blaise to visit him, but so far it wasn't working and he was getting desperate. He'd tried bribery, guile, anger, intimidation, persuasion, and had even gone as far as to beg her to let them in, but nothing worked. Even when he put on a sorrowful expression and looked soulfully up at her with puppy-dog eyes she had not relented. Instead she had forced down him a

vile tasting potion and bustled out of the room muttering about “unruly children nowadays”.

I never knew what the phrase “heart of stone” meant till now, thought Harry feeling disillusioned and extremely sorry for himself. This was the first time he hadn’t been able to talk someone into doing what he wanted. He *never* failed. It just wasn’t fair.

Just as he was about to try and sneak out of bed and escape (something that would definitely not work, as he didn’t even have his wand with him, Madame Pomfrey had confiscated it.) the door to the hospital wing opened and Dumbledore stepped inside.

“Hell, what does he want this time,” growled Harry to himself, scowling and burying his face in the covers.

“Headmaster! Whatever are you doing in here? I hope there is not some problem?” Madame Pomfrey asked coming out of her office.

“No, no, I just wish to speak to Harry,” replied Dumbledore. Was it Harry’s imagination, or did Dumbledore sound slightly different? He sounded more grave and less full of himself than usual.

“Professor, the boy needs his rest. If you could just come back later-”

“I assure you, I would if I could, but this is...urgent. Yes...urgent. If you could please...give us some privacy?” Harry noted how the Headmaster seemed to be searching for words during his reply. He kept that stored in the back of his head for possible future use.

“Very well. As you wish Headmaster. I will go and talk to Severus about some potions I need, but I must ask you not to strain my patient.”

With that the nurse left looking extremely put out with having to let Harry out of her clutches, if only for a short while. As soon as the door clicked shut behind her, Dumbledore let out a huge sigh.

“Whew, that was close,” he said with uncharacteristic relief.

“Okay, what’s going on?” asked Harry confused.

"Oh, sorry, I forgot to change," Dumbledore replied. Except it wasn't Dumbledore anymore. His body had melted and reshaped itself leaving a very different person altogether.

"Blaise!" gasped Harry in surprise.

"Keep it down will you," said Blaise crossly. "If I'm found out I'll be so busted. No one's supposed to know of my Morphing ability, remember?"

"Oh sorry, just a *tad* shocked there. Though I should have known it was you. You didn't act quite like Dumbledore normally does."

"Well excuse me. I come all the way here to see you and performed one of my hardest transformations yet, and what thanks do I get?" she said putting on a wounded expression. "Do you know how hard it is to transfigure your voice-box? I am hurt, deeply hurt."

"Yeah, yeah, so sorry," said Harry insincerely. "Where's Draco?"

"Oh dammit, I forgot. Wait one sec." Blaise skipped over to the door and opened it. "Coasts clear," she called softly. Immediately Draco's head appeared in mid air in front of her, soon followed by the rest of his body.

"You could've come sooner," said Draco reproachfully. "Mrs Norris was wandering around and I'm not sure invisibility cloaks work on cats – especially ones as horrible as her. You took ages. How long does it take to find out if there are no teachers or prefects in the hospital wing?"

"If you're going to do something, you should do it properly. I was merely being thorough," said Blaise primly. At Draco's disbelieving look she caved and admitted, "Fine, I forgot about you. S'not my fault, I was busy arguing with Harry. He was insulting my precious transformation."

Harry raised his eyebrows at her. "Blaise, I merely remarked that you could use some work on your acting skills."

Blaise huffed indignantly. "I think I did perfectly well, thank you very much!"

"*Anyone* could've seen through that guise of yours. You might want to find out more about the person and rehearse your conversation in your head before you actually start talking. They'll become suspicious. And don't imitate someone as important as Dumbledore. Perhaps Snape. Pomfrey wouldn't question Snape, because, face it, he's a little scarier than most teachers."

"Whatever. I guess you have a point." Blaise rolled her eyes. "It's nice to see you actually figuring something out, though. I thought you'd be stupid *forever!*"

"Hey!" Harry threw a Chocolate Frog at her, which she caught deftly and started eating.

"Zanks!" she said through the chocolate in her mouth. She turned to Draco.

"Earsh to Dayco! Talk, me ma'!" Draco sneered at her in disgust as spit came flying out of her mouth to him.

"Eat with your mouth closed, Blaise," he said, shaking his head. Blaise stuck her tongue out at him, showing some chocolate with it. Draco recoiled and pretended to throw up while Blaise played oblivious to it. Harry rolled his eyes at their tactics.

"So anyway Harry. How are you?" asked Draco.

Happy that *one* of his friends was showing some concern for him, Harry opened his mouth to reply only to be cut off.

"Ooh, more sweets!" cried Blaise happily, reaching out and helping herself to another handful of chocolate frogs. She then bounced over to Harry's bed and threw herself down upon it, nearly squashing him flat.

"Do you have the Stone?" Draco asked ignoring the scuffle going on in Harry's bed and coming straight to the point.

“Uh...you see, the thing about that is...” Harry stammered, wracking his brain for the right words.

“I think he means no,” remarked Blaise to Draco.

“Dammit!” growled the blond. “What the hell went wrong? All you had to do was go in, take the Stone, and come back out. How much easier can you get? My plan was fool-proof.”

“No it wasn’t,” said Blaise, opening a box of Bertie Bott’s Every Flavour Beans and peering inside it. “You completely overlooked one very important detail. Ooh, look! Banana! I love banana.”

“Well, I didn’t see you remembering,” snapped Draco.

“What?” asked Harry, “What happened?”

“Efogoot oabout e asserd,” mumbled Blaise through a mouthful of chocolate.

“*What?*” asked Harry blankly. “I didn’t understand a word of that.”

After swallowing, she repeated scathingly. “I *said*, ‘he forgot about the password.’ Perfectly clear to anyone with brains.”

With a sheepish look on his face, Draco said, “The passageway to the dungeons can only be opened by a Parselmouth.”

“So that’s why neither of you turned up,” said Harry smirking at Draco’s discomfort. “So much for your fool proof plan.”

“Come on! It was a mistake anyone could have made,” protested Draco embarrassed.

“Maybe, but the fact remains that *you* made it. And after bragging about how utterly brilliant you are, I-”

“Yeah, whatever,” interrupted Draco hastily. “Why don’t you tell us what happened in the dungeons.”

“You guys really want to know?” asked Harry, not sure if he wanted to relive the whole experience.

“Yeah, go on,” encouraged Blaise. “I’ll even stop eating to listen to you.”

“Wow, I feel so loved,” said Harry sarcastically. “Well, with that encouragement how can I possibly say no?”

“One thing I want to make absolutely clear was that it was no where near as easy as Draco made it sound. For one thing, Quirrell was already there. For another, so was Voldemort.”

He continued talking, telling them all that happened, including every little detail. He found that he was enjoying himself immensely. His two friends, especially Blaise, were a very good audience (if you ignored Draco saying in a superior tone that he would of done much better in Harry’s place); they gasped in all the right places and for the most part he had their undivided attention.

“So you didn’t actually see the stone being destroyed?” asked Draco with a hopeful look on his face. “So it could still be intact, just hidden somewhere by Dumbledore?”

“I guess,” agreed Harry cautiously. “I just wouldn’t get your hopes up if I were you.”

“Yes, but it’s possible. There’s still a chance we can get our hands on it. Imagine, immortality and eternal riches.”

“Oh stop being so greedy, Draco, and let’s go before Pomfrey comes back and catches us,” said Blaise. Grabbing some last sweets in one hand and Draco in another, she dragged him from the room.

“Bye Harry!” she called over her shoulder. “See y’later. We’ll try and sneak in again as long as you remember to leave some sweets for me.”

With that the door slammed shut and Harry was alone once more. That was until Madame Pomfrey stalked in a couple of seconds later and forced yet another bottle of disgusting medicine down Harry’s throat, complaining under her breath about arrogant Potion Masters.

Deciding it would be best not to anger her further, Harry helped himself to some of his sweets and snuggled down under the covers prepared to make the most of missing school.

Chapter 19:

After a good nights sleep, Harry felt nearly back to normal.

"I want to go to the feast," he told Madame Pomfrey as she straightened out his many sweet boxes. "I can, can't I?"

"Professor Dumbledore says you are to be allowed to go," she said sniffily, as though in her opinion Professor Dumbledore didn't know how risky feasts could be.

"Great!" exclaimed Harry and immediately jumped out of bed ready to run down to the great hall at once.

"Exactly where do you think you're going?" asked the nurse threateningly. "The feast doesn't start for another three hours. Potter, get back here!" When he didn't return, she raised her voice more. "This minute, if you please, Mr. Potter!"

Unfortunately for her, Harry was already out the door and down the stairs before she could even finish her sentence. Smirking in triumph he slowed down to a walk as he neared the dungeons (after all he had to think of his image; Slytherins had to keep their composure calm and impassive) and soon after reached his dormitories. Entering the common room, he saw that Draco and Blaise didn't seem to be there. Walking over to fellow Slytherins Louise Feral and Pansy Parkinson, he asked, "Hey, do any of you know where Blaise or Draco are?"

"Oh hi Harry! Sorry, I haven't got a clue. What happened by the way? Why were you in the hospital wing?" Pansy asked in a rush. Harry didn't like her nor dislike her, because he knew so little of her as it was.

"Oh, I was trying to steal a Philosophers Stone," said Harry offhandedly. "Long story short, damn Quirrell was there, distracted me. Got into a bit of an... *argument* per say."

"Wow, there's a Philosophers Stone at Hogwarts?" exclaimed Gregory Goyle coming over to where the other first years were. Harry hid his sneer at him. The boy seemed to be Slytherin material, but

seemed to lack talent in the wits area. Though after all, appearances could be deceiving. There could be more to the boy than met the eye. "Awesome, where is it?"

"It's been destroyed," said Harry, scowling full force this time.

"Tough luck," said Louise Feral sympathetically.

"Tough luck?" repeated Thomas Nott in disbelief. "A magical artefact that gives you unending life and gold has just been destroyed, and all you can say is tough luck!" Harry agreed with him mentally. The boy was definitely made for Slytherin, that was for sure.

"I prefer more of a challenge in life," drawled Louise. "I don't see the point of having everything handed to you. And remember, money isn't everything."

"No, but it's high up on the list," said Thomas Nott unhappily, still mourning the loss of his imaginary fame and fortune. Harry silently cheered for him.

"Well, my first priority is power," said Millicent Bulstrode. "You need power to rule the world." Harry smirked at this point. How interesting it was to see his fellow Slytherins in a debate. It was interesting hearing the different ambitions his class mates had.

"Yeah, but then someone is always going to overthrow you," pointed out Louise. *Which is a very true fact*, thought Harry. "It's much easier just to be second in command. You have a lot of power without having all the responsibility. If it all goes wrong you can probably slither your way out of the wreckage. Ruling the world isn't all it's cracked up to be."

"You just say that cause you know you'll never get to the top," said Millicent dismissively.

"Oh, like you would get anywhere with your looks!" replied Louise scathingly.

"Why you little--" growled Millicent drawing her wand and pointing it at the other girl.

"Ladies, ladies. Calm down," said Harry smoothly cutting into the argument. He really did not have time to waste on petty fights. "As fascinating as it is seeing you two blow each other up, why don't you try exercising some self control and refrain from fighting until you have answered my question. Does anyone know where Draco and Blaise are?"

"Sorry, Harry. The left a short while ago," said Vincent Crabbe. "Draco was muttering something about hanging Weasley out of a window upside down. That's all I know. They'll come to the feast though, so you may as well wait till then. Blaise would never miss a meal and tonight will be a real celebration. Slytherin have won the house cup by miles."

"With no thanks to you," muttered Pansy staring pointedly at Harry.

"What the hell do you mean by that, Parkinson?" asked Harry angrily rounding on her.

"Oh, just ignore her," said Thomas Nott. "She's only sulking about you missing the last Quidditch match while you were in the hospital wing."

"Oh yeah, I forgot. Awfully sorry about that," said Harry, nervously wondering what Flint would say, or do, to him for leaving Slytherin without a Seeker.

"Don't worry, we still won. Vincent and Gregory here took out every single player on the Hufflepuff team so they had to forfeit the match," said Louise looking extremely smug.

"I've got the whole game recorded on my Omnioculars if you want to see it," offered Millicent. "It was absolutely hilarious. The Hufflepuffs dropped out like flies."

"Yeah, yeah, enough about Quidditch," drawled Pansy. "It gets so boring after a while. I want to know more about this Stone."

"I agree. Come on Harry, out with it. What happened," demanded Gregory.

"I'm not saying," said Harry determinedly.

“Look Harry,” said Louise sweetly with an evil glint in her eye. “We can do this the easy way, which is you telling us what we want to know, or there’s the hard way, where we nag, curse, whine, threaten and scream at you until you give in.”

“Maybe some other time,” said Harry hastily. “Gotta go, see ya at the feast!” With that he was out of the common room as fast as he could. To make sure his classmates couldn’t follow him he sneaked down a parseltongue passageway and spent the remaining time until the feast lazing around in the pool.

Later on that evening Harry made his way down to the end-of-year feast alone. The hall was decked out in silver and green to celebrate Slytherin winning the house cup for the seventh year in a row. A huge banner showing the Slytherin serpent covered the wall behind the High Table.

When Harry walked in there was a sudden hush and then everybody started talking loudly at once. He slipped into a seat beside Draco and Blaise and tried to ignore the fact that people were standing up to look at him. Looking around himself, Harry happily noticed that Flint was sitting at the other end of the table. Harry really did not want to die a slow and painful death right now. And he had no doubt that the Fifth year Slytherin would arrange some kind of revenge. And unfortunately for Harry, he also had to deal with his classmates, who were looking at him with deadly determination.

“So Harry, you going to tell us more about what we discussed earlier today?” asked Louise with narrowed eyes. Harry grinned inwardly, knowing that she couldn’t mention the Philosopher’s Stone in front of the rest of the school so he was relatively safe from interrogation.

“I’m sorry, I have no recollection of talking about anything,” replied Harry calmly.

“Don’t try to slither your way out of this-“ began Pansy before being interrupted by Dumbledore arriving. The babble from the different tables died slowly away and the students waited for the annual end of year speech. They were not disappointed.

“Another year gone!” Dumbledore said cheerfully. Harry mentally rolled his eyes. That old man was too cheerful for his own good. “And I must trouble you with an old man’s waffle before we sink our teeth into our delicious feast. What a year it has been! Hopefully your heads are all a little fuller than they were... you have a whole summer ahead to get them nice and empty before the next year starts.”

The Slytherins were by this time bored out of their minds and had turned to each other and started talking in quiet voices. Their attention was immediately brought back though by what Dumbledore said next.

“Now, the house cup needs awarding and the points stand thus: in fourth place, Hufflepuff, with three hundred and twelve points; in third, Gryffindor, with three hundred and fifty-two; Ravenclaw have four hundred and twenty-six and Slytherin five hundred and seventy-two.”

A storm of cheering and stamping broke out from the Slytherin table. Beside Harry, Draco was banging his goblet on the table and even elder Slytherins such as sixth year Daisy Thornbell relaxed their attitudes enough to show some pleasure through their usually frozen exteriors. Up at the staff Professor Snape was seen smirking and shaking hands with Professor McGonagall with a very smug and self-satisfied look on his face.

“Yes, well done Slytherin,” said Dumbledore obviously not meaning it. “But there are some last minute points to give out.” The Slytherins quieted after this point. Harry smirked to himself. Oh he was going to enjoy what this old man was going to say next. “To Mr Harry Potter, for his acts of extreme bravery and pure nerve, I award Slytherin twenty points.” Harry let his smirk loose as he spotted some of the Gryffindors scowling furiously towards him. “Mr Potter’s courage, selflessness and chivalry are an example to us all.” His smirk faltered slightly. Dumbledore was portraying him as a Gryffindor! Oh the shame!

After some halfhearted applause by some of Harry’s fans in other houses the Hall fell silent, filled only with the angry mutterings from the Slytherin table. Harry had to give Dumbledore credit; in a couple of sentences he had managed to destroy all the triumph felt by the

Slytherins. Even an extra twenty points were not enough to stem the malice that they now harboured towards the Headmaster. There was a general consensus that Dumbledore had overstepped all boundaries by effectively calling one of their own a Gryffindor. For a Slytherin to be congratulated for such sickening emotions as bravery and selflessness was a deadly insult. Harry was generally well liked and his housemates took an attack on him very personally.

“What the hell is he playing at!” hissed Draco angrily to Harry. “He knows perfectly well that a Gryffindor wouldn’t have lasted a second against Quirrell and Voldemort. It took Slytherin cunning and guile to survive at all let alone manage to drive Voldemort away. Slytherin power and ruthlessness were the things that got you through that. Not reckless bravery and acts of stupidity. A Gryffindor would have been pulverised within seconds.”

Harry didn’t even bother answering. He was busy glaring at Dumbledore with a look of the utmost loathing on his face. The aging headmaster looked slightly worried at seeing the hatred Harry directed at him and for once did the intelligent thing and shut up, letting the school get on with the feast.

By the end of the meal the Slytherins had regained their composure and were thoroughly enjoying exulting over the other houses at winning the house cup. By the time they were down in the common rooms they were fully recovered and were ready to celebrate all night long.

Drinks were served, lights dimmed and music turned up full volume. The students spent the rest of the night dancing and making out, for once letting down their guard. The few Slytherins that managed to drag themselves up to bed early in the next morning were completely satisfied and were content to plot revenge the next day, as soon as the room stopped spinning and they got rid of their dreadful headaches.

Harry had almost forgotten that the exam results were still to come, but come they did. Draco, Blaise and Harry had all done extremely well. Draco had got the highest mark in Potions and, surprisingly, Astronomy. Blaise had come top in Transfiguration, Care of Magical

Creatures and came second to Harry in Charms. Harry had also got top marks in Defence, which was far and away his favourite subject. Their marks were not very surprising, Blaise's Metamorph abilities and her love for dangerous animals made her work hard in both Transfiguration and Care of Magical Creatures. Draco was Snape's favourite pupil so him getting any less than 100 would be close to impossible. All in all, the three Slytherins were happy, though Draco was sulking about coming second place to Granger, a bushy haired Gryffindor, in a couple of subjects.

All the other Slytherins had also done well, and even Vincent Crabbe managed to threaten and bribe his way up to a pass mark in most subjects.

And then it was the last day before the train ride home. Notes were handed out to all the students warning them not to do magic during the holidays, Draco caused one last scuffle in the hallways where a Hufflepuff ended up hanging upside down from the candelabra, and Harry spent his time frantically packing and trying to avoid Marcus Flint.

As the 1st years boarded the train, Harry, Blaise and Draco snuck off into a separate compartment by themselves. Pansy and Louise were still trying to get information out of Harry and at the moment were in their whining, whinging and nagging stage, and Harry felt as if he was going to crack any second. Luckily, the other Slytherins were too busy tormenting the first year Gryffindors to notice the trio sneaking off.

"At last, the holidays are finally here," squealed Blaise happily as she jumped up and down in excitement.

"Ow! Blaise, do you have to be so high pitched? It's making my head hurt," moaned Draco, rubbing his ears with a pained expression.

"Oh stop whining," said Blaise, waving her hand at him dismissively.

"I'm not whining!" glared the blonde, drawing himself up indignantly. "Malfoys never whine. We always behave with the utmost grace and style."

“Whatever, it sounded like whining to me,” grinned Blaise.

“I’m telling you, I did not whine. I merely remarked that-“

“Will you two please stop bickering? Blaise, stop trying to get a rise out of Draco. His constitution can’t take it,” drawled Harry with a grin. Blaise just smirked back at him while Draco looked offended. Before the blonde could start ranting again, however, Blaise asked,

“What’s wrong Harry? You’ve been looking depressed for ages. If you’re worried about Flint, I know for a fact he’s at the other end of the train making out with his Ravenclaw girlfriend.”

“As much as I thank you for the fascinating info, I wasn’t actually worried about Marcus at all. I was just thinking about the holidays and how utterly miserable I’m going to be,” replied Harry looking extremely sorry for himself.

“With your relatives and all you mean? I don’t know what the big deal is. You can just threaten them with magic. And don’t forget you have Nemesis as well. I’m sure she’ll bite them for you,” said Blaise helpfully.

“What an excellent idea,” grinned Harry, an evil smirk beginning to form on his face. “I can’t believe I didn’t think of that.”

“Speaking of Nemesis,” said Draco, who had finally decided to stop sulking. “Where is she by the way?”

“Here,” replied Harry, lifting up his robe sleeve revealing a snoozing Nemesis curled around his arm.

“Aww, isn’t she so sweet,” said Blaise, making baby noises. Harry pulled the snake away from her in disgust.

“First of all, Nemesis is one of the most deadly snakes in the entire world. I would hardly call her sweet. And not only that, she’s also the most annoying snake on the entire planet. She’s extremely uncaring towards her friends,” sniffed Harry. He was currently annoyed at the snake for not coming to visit him in hospital, and wouldn’t accept Nemesis’ excuse that she was having a girly chat with one of her

friends in the Forbidden Forest the whole time Harry was ill. He was sure she had just been too busy being made a fuss of by Blaise to bother visiting.

“Well, anyway, I’m not going to have that good a summer, though I am hoping to bully my father into buying some tickets to a Quidditch match. You guys can come too if you want. I’ll owl you during the holidays,” interrupted Draco in his usual Malfoy drawl.

The rest of their time was spent eating sweets, talking about their holidays, and thinking up new pranks to play on Weasely. Harry was feeling much happier about the two months off from school now that he had Blaise’s advice. He could get the Dursleys to do pretty much anything he wanted if he threatened them with magic. A smirk made its way onto his face. He was going to have a lot of fun with Dudley this summer. *Watch out Dursleys*, he thought maliciously as the train sped off to King’s Cross to said people waiting for him.

Author’s Notes: Okay, this story is finally over. Please review and tell me what you think. All you have to do is push the little button at the bottom of the screen. Anyway, thank you to all my reviewers who encouraged me along the way, and a special thank you to Jeni Black, my amazing beta reader. Without her, I would probably have given up on this story weeks ago. Ms. Jeni Black has given me lots of ideas over the past month or so, and has always encouraged me immensely. She is actually currently writing a fic of her own called ‘Two Worlds One War’ which is an excellent story and well worth reading, so check it out.

I will be writing a sequel to this story, but I first have to sort out my ideas, so it may come out in one week or five months. I really don’t know. Anyway, keep a look out for it, and, if I receive suitable encouragement (cough **review** cough)

Beta Note: I think this will be the final conclusion of this story. I’m not sure if Ms. SR is going to release the sequel soon, but keep watching out for it. Thank you for all your wonderful reviews. Everyone clap for Ms. SlythsRule for her outstanding work in writing this story!